

Patrick heralds company's decision to expand in Massachusetts

By Glen Johnson, AP Political Writer | May 31, 2007

WORCESTER, Mass. --Gov. Deval Patrick, who has pledged to both retain Massachusetts companies and promote life sciences research, scored a two-fer Thursday as a Canton bioengineering firm announced it was expanding in the state.

Organogenesis Inc., which makes living skin substitutes, had been considering its expansion in neighboring Rhode Island and already had a site picked out. It reversed course after Patrick announced a \$1 billion life sciences initiative earlier this month.

"I think they feel like the climate is right for life sciences and that's exactly what we want Organogenesis and other companies to feel," Patrick told The Associated Press as he visited Worcester for a news conference focusing on crime victims.

Geoff MacKay, president and chief executive officer of Organogenesis, agreed.

"Our decision to stay here is directly as a result of economic development intervention," MacKay told the AP. "We love the culture and the climate, but financially it didn't work for us. What the state's new initiative did was level the playing field."

Organogenesis will add 300 jobs, doubling its existing employee base and expanding its facilities to 250,000 square feet.

Organogenesis was founded in 1985 and describes itself as a leading tissue regeneration company. It has employees both in the United States and Switzerland. Its primary product is Apligraf, a form of bioengineered skin that is used to close open wounds on diabetics and the overweight.

Patrick was to attend a formal announcement at mid-afternoon Thursday, along with House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi and Senate President Therese Murray.

"Today's announcement shows the climate for doing business in Massachusetts is improving and that we must continue to do all we can to help companies keep jobs here, expand here and move here," DiMasi said in a statement.

A former executive at two Fortune 50 companies, Patrick has pledged to enact a promise previously made by former Gov. Mitt Romney, another corporate executive-turned-governor: to serve as the state's chief salesman. Patrick has focused on retaining 342 major employers in the state, while also bolstering a sales staff to attract new employers.

He has paid particular focus on the life sciences industry, which has a base in Cambridge and along Route 128. Last month he paid daily visits to a biotechnology conference in Boston to promote the state's friendliness toward business.

He also announced a 10-year, \$1 billion initiative to promote stem cell research and other life sciences work in Massachusetts. It would create a bank of stem-cell lines for public and private research, establish research grants for scientists and upgrade public college facilities for public and private use.

In addition, it includes tax incentives to promote development of life sciences companies.

During his visit to Worcester, Patrick announced the Department of Public Health was providing \$600,000 in grants to six hospitals so social workers can intervene at the earliest moment with crime victims.

The money will be used for staff training and to enable the hospitals to staff violence intervention advocates during peak crime hours.

The hospitals receiving grants are the UMass Memorial Hospital in Worcester, Lawrence General Hospital, Bay State Medical Center in Springfield, Brockton Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital in New Bedford and Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

"We know there is a strong link between victimization and further acts of violence," the governor said before he convened a roundtable discussion at the city's new Boys and Girls Club. "Connecting with the victims and providing services to meet their immediate need and keeping them safe can help us prevent further acts of violence that they may experience or may even take part in."

Patrick said the grants were part of a comprehensive crime fighting strategy that has previously included funding for additional police officers.