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AIDS Organizations Support New HIV Testing Bill

Praise bill as a move in the right direction

New York, NY (April 6, 2009) – Five AIDS service organizations today endorsed legislation proposed by State Senate Health Committee Chair Thomas Duane that would bring New York’s HIV counseling and testing law up-to-date with the realities facing the epidemic today.

“Far too many individuals learn of their HIV status concurrently with an AIDS diagnosis, and far too many persons are HIV infected and not aware of their status,” said Sharen Duke, CEO of AIDS Service Center NYC. “New, more aggressive efforts must be made to expand HIV testing, including making testing a routine part of medical care.”

Much has changed in HIV since the passage of legislation that established New York State’s HIV counseling and testing laws in 1988, including new therapies that have effectively turned HIV from a devastating disease to a condition that can be managed indefinitely through effective treatment. Additionally, the expansion of HIV into communities of color and disenfranchised populations has posed considerable and serious challenges.

Senator Duane’s proposed legislation would allow the consent to an HIV test to be incorporated into a general consent for medical care, with a clearly marked place adjacent to signature where a patient may decline an HIV test. This would eliminate the need for a separate, written informed consent to an HIV test.

Emma DeVito, president and CEO of Village Care, said, “It makes great sense with what the epidemic faces today to offer everyone an HIV test, not just those deemed to be 'at risk' after an assessment.”

“We believe that this bill is a move in the right direction to eliminating barriers to testing. The addition of a referral list of local community service providers for those who test positive for HIV infection would further help to ensure that individuals are made aware of the resources available,” Dr. Gail Barouh, president and CEO of LIAAC, said.

Adrian Fassett, president and CEO of EOC of Suffolk, also strongly supports Senator Duane’s testing bill “as an excellent step toward increased access to testing that can help New Yorkers learn their HIV status and receive early care and treatment that leads to long-term survival.”

The five organizations supporting Senator Duane’s modifications—AIDS Service Center NYC; Brooklyn AIDS Task Force; Economic Opportunity Council of Suffolk; Long Island Association for AIDS Care; and Village Care of New York—collectively provide services to more than 12,000 persons with HIV/AIDS each year.

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