



Connecticut AIDS Resource Coalition

Testimony Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget Mitigation Plan
Shawn M Lang
9 December 2009

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, members of the committee. My name is Shawn Lang and I'm the Director of Public Policy with the CT AIDS Resource Coalition and Co-chair of the AIDS LIFE Campaign, CT's statewide advocacy group.

The Governor has once again instituted rescissions, and proposed even greater Machiavellian cuts to HIV prevention, health care, housing and more; cuts that will cause irreparable harm to many of our state's most vulnerable, and medically and socially fragile citizens, including people living with HIV/AIDS.

Her proposal calls for slashing AIDS Services and Syringe Exchange Programs by 25%! These programs are the foundational front line of HIV prevention in our state. They have done such a great job that the number of new cases of HIV/AIDS among injecting drugs users has **declined by 30%** over the past ten years. And, we've seen a reduction in newly reported HIV/AIDS cases.

However, during the same time the number of people **living with HIV/AIDS has doubled to 10,860**. And the funding has never come close to keeping pace. If these cuts go through, we will fall even shorter in preventing HIV infection rates, in getting people tested early on in their disease, and in assisting people in accessing and staying in care. Nationwide, nearly **25% of those receiving an HIV diagnosis get an AIDS diagnosis** at the same time. In the richest state in the country, in the richest country in the world, why is this allowed to happen?

One only need look at the statistics to know that slashing these programs will open the gateway to increased HIV infections. CT ranks 14th in the nation in AIDS cases per capita; 1st in AIDS cases among injecting drug users; 3rd in cases among women and Latinos. In the City of Hartford alone, 83% of those living with HIV/AIDS are people of color.

The face of the AIDS epidemic in CT is profoundly different than that of the rest of the country, and the Governor's proposed cuts will only serve to fan the flames of further destruction. Clearly, people of color and those who are marginalized and suffer the additional stigma of drug use are disproportionately affected.

The syringe exchange programs provide a vast array of services to their clients. Since 1996:

Nearly **2,000 new clients** have come into the programs;

Nearly, **30,000 units of risk reduction interventions** have been provided;

6,880 people entered treatment; and

1.5 million syringes were collected.

We fully understand the nature of the state's fiscal crisis and are willing to share our part of burden along with everyone else, but not a disproportionate share that the Governor is proposing.

If these cuts go through, we will find ourselves on the precipice of a disaster as an AIDS community. The very fragile safety net we now have in place will be torn to shreds. Proposing these cuts this deep at a time when the numbers of people living with HIV/AIDS continues to grow is counter intuitive and is an insult to all that we've accomplished thus far. These programs are scientifically proven to work and be cost effective. CT's syringe exchange programs were once viewed as a national model. They would not just symbolize the erosion of access, but perhaps more simply put, these proposed cuts will result in the decimation of any semblance of good public health policy on HIV in this state.

We lend our voice to those who will articulate the damage further cuts to community mental health services, Medicaid and psychiatric medications, elimination of non-emergency dental services, housing, and to preserve the legislative commissions, in particular PCSW and Office of Childcare Advocate.

There are revenue enhancements and other choices that can be made. Policymakers are refusing added costs to the most wealthy -- but have already approved bigger, more devastating burdens on those with the least resources in our state. We cannot afford to continue down this path.

I call on all of you once again, to stave off these cuts to ensure that people with HIV/AIDS, families, poor people, the elderly and those with disabilities -- are not thrown into the dreadful abyss of neglect.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

