

Testimony
December 9, 2009
Connecticut State Legislature
Legislative Office Building
Room 2C

This letter is my written testimony against the proposed budget of Governor Rell in her Deficit Mitigation Plan which is now pending before you. First, her proposal to cut twenty-five percent from the AIDS service line and syringe exchange programs would be devastating and would, almost immediately, destroy decades of work created in AIDS prevention and care services. Connecticut now reports having nearly 20,000 people living with HIV/AIDS. As a result, Connecticut ranks 5th nationally in the number of persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) which is a testimony to the success in HIV/AIDS harm reduction programs in the state. There are more people now living with the HIV virus than progressing to full blown AIDS because of the service network created by the current funding streams. It is also important to note that Connecticut has been important in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS by intravenous drug users because of our syringe exchange programs. Without syringe exchange HIV/AIDS cases and mortality rates would be much higher.

Cutting funding for HIV/AIDS will have predictable results. We can predict that there will be an increases in the number of HIV and AIDS cases reported to the state and federal government, increases in AIDS mortality rates, increases in the rate of homelessness; since, nearly 30%-50% of those with HIV/AIDS are or have been either homeless or near homeless before receiving service because many live below federal poverty levels. Additionally, there is the real possibility of causing the emergence of drug resistance viral strains to the HIV/AIDS medications which now prevent the spread of the disease since, subsequent to any cuts, clients will be without service or housing.

Lastly, Governor Rell's proposal violates the federal ban on maintenance of effort in relation to our federal funding streams. By cutting the state funding, Governor Rell puts in real jeopardy the federal funds which support prevention and care services such as Ryan White monies coming into the State. We just recently saw how the federal funding cuts required the state to allocate millions of dollars to close the funding gap created by the federal cuts. Then, as now, we saw how restoring the funding helped avoid the dislocation of HIV/AIDS services statewide. Are we to repeat this tragic scenario again?

I implore you, do not allow the proposed cuts of the Governor to take affect. The costs of prevention is far better than the costs associated with trying to provide care for AIDS.

Sincerely,

Matthew F. Lopes, Jr., M.P.H.
Coordinator HIV/AIDS Services
New Haven Health Department