

**Testimony**  
**Appropriations Committee**  
**Submitted by Linda Estabrook**  
**February 18, 2010**

Good evening. My name is Linda Estabrook. I am Executive Director of the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective. The Health Collective receives funding to provide HIV prevention programs targeting the population the Centers for Disease Control refers to as men who have sex with men or MSM. These men are our brothers and fathers and sons. They are our friends.

Please, do not implement a 30% cut in state funding for HIV prevention programs.

There are thousands of individuals living in Connecticut who are part of this target population. They continue to need comprehensive, multi-faceted HIV prevention programs. Our job at the Health Collective is to meet each person where they are; to provide them with the information and tools to live a sex positive life while at the same time limiting their risk of acquiring HIV or transmitting HIV.

Our programs include:

**SafetyNet**-individuals communicate HIV prevention messages to their friends and family. This approach helps to develop a community sensibility around prevention and safer sex. This program has statewide impact.

**Mpowerment**-reaches young MSM ages 18-29. While HIV has been around for many years, these young men are coming of age and need HIV prevention education. They did not live through the devastation of illness and death that affected so many of us when HIV/AIDS was a death sentence. And we don't want them to have to experience it either. Right now we have over 50 young men who are actively participating in this program and encouraging their friends to take individual responsibility for safer sex practices.

**Project KEEP**- individuals talking with peers in their social networks, especially those who have never been testing for HIV. This program encourages individuals to get counseled, educated about and tested. This intervention has successfully brought individuals into our agency for prevention services. For individuals testing positive for HIV, we are able to link them to needed services.

These are just a few examples of how HIV prevention happens in Connecticut.

The public health impact of decreasing the availability of HIV prevention is significant. Is a 30% cut really worth the risk of increased infections with the attendant burden of increased medical care costs for those who become HIV positive? This is counter to the current climate of refocusing our medical care towards prevention.

Our programs have already experienced a cut in funding, shouldering our share of the burden the current economy has placed on all of us. Cutting HIV prevention programs such as ours with a drastic 30% cut in state funding will have to result in job losses and layoffs. The programs we have worked so hard to develop, that are reaching people and are having a positive impact in their lives, will be cut back significantly. I urge you to avoid this cut in funds.

Thank you.