Written Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget
Erica Roggeveen Byrne
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To Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the committee:

My name is Erica Roggeveen Byrne, and I work at Latino Community Services in Hartford. I am also a member of the City of Hartford HIV/AIDS Commission and the CT HIV Planning Group, a statewide HIV/AIDS prevention and care planning group.

I'm submitting this written testimony to urge you **not** to accept the 30% cuts to AIDS Prevention Services and the Syringe Exchange Program.

As a community-based nonprofit organization that has been serving the HIV prevention and care needs of the Latino community since 1986, Latino Community Services understands the fiscal crisis that Connecticut is facing. We understand scarce resources and making tough decisions. But we also understand that behind every choice is a person, or a family, or a community – and their lives depend on us.

I've been taught that **numbers are people**. They aren't abstractions, or percentages - they are men, women, children, facing the same challenges we all face - addictions, family struggles, unemployment, discrimination. The one thousand nine hundred and seventy seven people living with HIV/AIDS in Hartford are part of our community. Over half of these individuals were infected with HIV through injection drug use, and over half are Hispanic. In fact, CT ranks 1st in the nation among AIDS cases among injecting drug users and 3rd in cases among Latinos.

Behind the 1,977 people living with HIV/AIDS in Hartford are thousands more in almost every town in the state. And behind them are tens of thousands who are at risk of becoming HIV infected. The HIV prevention programs in the state of Connecticut provide a vital service – CT's prevention programs and syringe exchange are scientifically proven to work AND are cost effective.

A 30% cut to AIDS Services creates a ripple effect in the community. The money that organizations like Latino Community Services receive does not stay in the organization – we support local small businesses like hair salons and bodegas by purchasing food, incentives, and other supplies for our programs. We collaborate with shelters, soup kitchens, schools, and churches to provide services.

We understand that the fiscal crisis is real and that budget cuts are a reality. But a **30% cut** to programs that work is NOT acceptable. Cutting effective, cost-saving, critical services for the most marginalized and stigmatized is not just bad public health and public policy – it's morally reprehensible. Let us remember our responsibilities as community servants, and make the hard decisions necessary to help all citizens of the state of Connecticut improve their quality of life and ability to lead healthy, productive lives. Thank you.