



## Connecticut AIDS Resource Coalition

### Testimony Appropriations Committee

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Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker, 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.

Over the last 10 years, the number of people **living with HIV/AIDS has doubled to 10,574**. And funding has never come close to keeping pace. In fact, over the past three years we've been cut a total of 34% from all the AIDS line items in the DPH and DSS budget. We've assisted in offering some of those cuts in areas where they could cause the least amount of harm. We are asking you to restore the rescissions in order to keep these programs whole.

While there are no cuts to the AIDS Service and Syringe Exchange Programs, they were both hit with a 5% rescission. This comes at a critical juncture in the 30 year history of HIV/AIDS.

CT ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in AIDS cases among injecting drug users; and 3<sup>rd</sup> in cases among women and Latinos. People of color and those who are otherwise marginalized and suffer the additional stigma of drug use are disproportionately affected. In the City of Hartford alone, 83% of those living with HIV/AIDS are people of color. And, nationally, 20% of people who are infected with HIV are unaware of their status and may be unknowingly infecting others. Because most people do not get tested for HIV on a routine basis, we're finding that the majority of those who are diagnosed with HIV receive an AIDS diagnoses within one year of the reported diagnosis of HIV. This means that we're increasingly dealing with a more medically and socially fragile population.

The face of the AIDS epidemic in CT is profoundly different than that of the rest of the country, and the recent rescissions to the AIDS Services and SEP (which primarily funds prevention efforts) may contribute to further erosion of our HIV prevention efforts. In fact, the CDC has completely overhauled the way they are funding HIV prevention which will cause CT to lose 50% of our federal prevention dollars over the next three years. The AIDS

Services funding targets people living with HIV who are out of care, to get them back into care, and those unaware of their status to get them tested, and get them into care, housing and prevention programs.

Over the nearly 30 years that HIV/AIDS has been a part of our lives, we have created a safety net in communities around the state, but it is a fragile and precarious safety net.

Since 2003, we've seen a 30% drop in newly reported cases in new HIV infections among injecting drug users. And, since 2006, we've experienced a nearly \$100,000 loss of funding. So much so, that DPH has gone from funding five SEPS, down to three. The SEPs have done a tremendous job of reaching out to and engaging perhaps the most marginalized segment of our population and seeing demonstrable results of their hard work. Curtailing the availability and scope of this critical program is shortsighted.

We are well aware of the fiscal crises in our state and are willing to shoulder our share of the burden facing you and the Governor in piecing together a thoughtful and balanced budget, but these rescissions will surely tear that safety net into shreds leaving thousands of people living with HIV/AIDS without life-saving services, and leaving communities without the much needed HIV prevention education.

I call on all of you once again, to stave off any deeper cuts to ensure that people with HIV/AIDS, families, poor people, the elderly and those with disabilities -- are not the ones on whose backs the budget is balanced.

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