



Testimony Appropriations Committee

Shawn M Lang

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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 AIDS Connecticut (ACT) 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 increased by 23% to 10,537** but funding during that same time only increased 3%. Frankly, the funding has never come close to keeping pace. If the rescissions aren't restored, we will return to 2001 funding levels, and 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, and staying housed.

Specifically, I'm here to urge you to restore the 5% rescissions that the governor issued to the SEPs and AIDS Services (prevention). We know that we continue to be in a deep fiscal crisis. But we've been bled dry. In fact, the last round of rescissions forced DPH go back in time from funding 5 SEPS, leaving us with just 3 funded programs. These programs are the foundational frontline of HIV prevention and losing any more ground at all is a poor decision and simply bad public health policy.

Over the past few years, we have worked with DPH, the legislature and the administration to identify \$4.5 million in cuts to various AIDS line items that wouldn't damage the critical safety net we've built over time.

As the first state to statutorily create syringe exchange programs, we have been looked to as a leader. We know that this is an incredibly cost effective, evidenced based HIV intervention. The data tells us that, over the past decade, newly reported cases of HIV in injecting drugs users has dropped by 30%! We simply cannot afford to return to the past when 50% of HIV cases were in injecting drug users.

The AIDS Services line in the DPH budget primarily funds HIV prevention as well as a new program that we're administering to provide HIV prevention medications to sexual assault victims who are un- or under-insured. CT saw a 30% reduction in our CDC HIV prevention funds as they are redirecting funding to areas of the country

that have the highest incidence of HIV, or the top tier areas. Philosophically, we agree with the direction that the CDCD is going in, but it's killing us in a practical sense. CT is a second tier area and over the next few years, will experience a 50% reduction in our federal HIV prevention funds.

If the rescissions aren't restored, we will find ourselves on the precipice of a disaster as an AIDS community. The very precarious safety net we now have in place will be torn to shreds. These programs are scientifically proven to work and be cost effective.

I call on all of you once again, to restore the rescission to ensure that people with HIV/AIDS, families, poor people, the elderly and those with disabilities – aren't the ones on whose backs the budget is balanced.

Vito Russo once said, "Someday, the AIDS crisis will be over. Remember that. And when that day comes -- when that day has come and gone, there'll be people alive on this earth -- gay people and straight people, men and women, black and white, who will hear the story that once there was a terrible disease in this country and all over the world, and that a brave group of people stood up and fought and, in some cases, gave their lives, so that other people might live and be free."

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