



**Testimony in support of
HB 6540 – An Act Concerning the Prophylactic Treatment of Minors for
Sexually Transmitted Diseases
25 February 2019**

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of the committee, my name is Shawn Lang, and I'm the Deputy Director with AIDS CT. I'm here to testify in support of **HB 6540 – An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV**.

As many of you know, I've been an AIDS activist since the 1980s helping to found the Middlesex County AIDS Buddy Network. That Buddy Network grew out of a conversation with the first friend of mine who came out to me as HIV+. He, and others, felt isolated as there were no services for people with HIV/AIDS in Middletown at that time. All volunteer run, we created the group to provide support and companionship to people with HIV/AIDS, many of whom felt alone, especially when they were sick, due to stigma and misinformation about the disease. I watched far too many friends die from complications of AIDS when there were no, or inadequate treatments available, and prevention efforts primarily consisted of condom distribution. The primary population that was hardest hit at that time were gay and bisexual men.

In CT, the population hardest hit by the epidemic in the early years were people who inject drugs. To address that population we passed legislation in 1991 to begin syringe services programs. Since then, we've completely reversed the tide of HIV infections among that group. In 2002, people who inject drugs accounted for 40% of new HIV infections, and in 2017, it was just 8%.

In stark contrast, gay and bisexual men or as the CDC defines them – men who have sex with men or MSM – accounted for 19% of new infection in 2002, and nearly 50% in 2017. 12% of those men are 29 and under, and 43% are Black and Latino.

Today, we have medications which, for many, make HIV a chronic manageable disease. In the realm of prevention, we have a robust toolbox full of interventions which include education, outreach, syringe services, HIV counseling and testing, and targeted prevention strategies – including apps and social media.

And, we have PrEP, which stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis – a one a day pill called Truvada that provides 92%-99% reduction in HIV transmission for people who take the medication as directed. PrEP also requires patients to see their provider every three months for medical care, sexually transmitted disease testing, and counseling.

PrEP is a game changer for HIV prevention, particularly for young, Black and Latino MSM. Our existing statues already allow medical providers to examine and treat sexually transmitted diseases. The proposed language simply clarifies providers' ability to prescribe a one a day medication to *prevent* a potentially deadly disease.

I urge you to support **HB 6540** to protect the rights of patients. Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

Shawn M. Lang, Deputy Director, AIDS CT