

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, my name is Rev. Charles Straight and I am the assistant pastor of the Wesley United Methodist Church on Chicago's South Side, and soon to be new board member of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago.

I'm not going to give you a bunch of numbers to remember because that's not what I do. Somebody else will tell you how significant those numbers are on the pages in front of you.

I just want to share with you how my life and that of others like me are affected by the money that needs to be allocated in this proposed budget amendment.

A couple of years ago, much to my dismay, a song won an Academy Award called "It's hard out here for a pimp."

In the City of Chicago right now let me tell you who it's hard here out for: it's hard out here for poor people and people of color who need HIV education and testing.

It's hard out here for poor people and people of color in Chicago living with HIV disease.

And it's hard out here for a black preacher in Chicago who reaches out to all people to educate them about HIV/AIDS in a loving, non-judgmental way.

We are beaten up by other clergy and sometimes members of our own congregations for the inclusive messages we preach.

And just plain old ignored by others members of our faith.

As a result of funding cuts, we lost one of the programs funded by the Chicago Department of Public Health that worked with African-American churches to raise HIV/AIDS awareness and educate pastors and church members about HIV/AIDS.

Unfortunately, stigma and homophobia are alive and well in our church and community. Stigma and homophobia are some of the same forces that are the drivers of new HIV infections among African Americans and people of color.

By conducting HIV prevention activities in churches, we can work to end homophobia and stigma and change the underlying causes of new HIV infections, depression, substance abuse, and other issues that cause an individual to take risks they know they shouldn't take.

I have had far too many people tell me they don't have safe sex because their lives were not worth saving, a message they too often heard in church.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's hard out here for a black preacher that embraces the idea of loving people into heaven and not condemning them to hell and we need some help.

The City of Chicago has a moral and ethical responsibility to adequately fund its health department for the good of the public health. What I would submit to you this morning is that the budget in its present form does not do that. Please add 1.7 million dollars to better fund HIV prevention. Thank you.