

## AFC launches push for city housing funds

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The AIDS Foundation of Chicago has launched a campaign intended to increase funding for housing for persons with HIV/AIDS in Chicago by \$1.5 million.

If the increase does not go through, over 200 Chicagoans with HIV/AIDS would be left without shelter, according to John Peller, director of political action for AFC.

Peller said that a one-time bonus in federal funding, received by the city in 2004, has been completely spent and that if a new source of funding is not identified, services to persons with HIV/AIDS would likely have to be cut in January 2008.

Much of the money is directed towards the city's Housing Assistance Program, which assists persons with HIV/AIDS in housing payments.

"Now, there just isn't any money. HAP has been surviving on leftovers," said Peller.

Persons in the program receive a subsidy of \$4,500 a year for their housing, but it has been closed to new applicants since 2005.

The city funding increase would be used for expanding rental assistance and housing locator and community residential services for HIV/AIDS-affected households.

Peller added that if the new money is not found, clients in

hospices and other facilities would not be able to move out on their own.

"Community residences can't throw people out in the cold, obviously," Peller said.

But since clients would be unable to move out, waiting lists for the facilities stand to substantially increase. Peller said that between 10,000-15,000 people with HIV/AIDS need housing assistance, but just 1,460 housing units are set aside for them.

Rev. Stan Sloan, CEO of Chicago House, said the waiting list at his organization is currently at about one client-per-bed. But should the cuts go through, he said, "It could go much deeper."

Those who've left a hospice and currently receive assistance are faced with an instability that could be detrimental to their health. Eric Nelson, director of development for Better Existence with HIV, said stable shelter is of paramount importance for persons with HIV/AIDS.

"If someone is homeless, that means they don't have an address. (That) impacts their ability to access medical care. It impacts their ability to fill prescriptions. It even impacts how they take their medicine. It makes it all the harder to take your medication with food, if you need to," Nelson said.

He added, "As the saying goes, housing is healthcare."

Sloan said there is a long-

term, bottom line benefit to the city as well.

"It's cheaper to keep people from losing their housing than it is to treat them continually in emergency rooms," Sloan said.

Peller said a person with HIV/AIDS who is in a stable living environment from the onset of their treatment is going to be faced with fewer hospital stays.

"If they have a decent place to live and eat properly, that leads to a direct reduction in viral loads and improvement in T-cell and CD4 counts," Peller said.

He urged people to write the mayor and their alderman over the issue.

"This fits in the mayor's vision of less homelessness in Chicago. AIDS housing is homelessness prevention," Peller said.

"The state budget is in disarray, and the federal government is not going to help," Nelson said. "The city is going to have to step up, and the mayor knows that."

AFC has scheduled a town hall meeting to discuss the issue Sept. 11 at 6 p.m. at 321 S. Plymouth, 5th floor. The organization has also started an online petition that can be accessed at its website, [www.aidschicago.org](http://www.aidschicago.org).