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**Advocates push for more funding for voluntary HIV testing services**

*By: Adriana Colindres*

Roughly a couple of hundred people, including Christian Reedy of Springfield, descended on the state Capitol on Wednesday to urge lawmakers to support initiatives and extra funding to help people with AIDS or HIV.

The advocates are seeking \$2 million to expand voluntary HIV-testing services. They also want lawmakers to pass separate pieces of legislation that they say would prevent fatal drug overdoses and would provide health insurance to low-income Illinoisans, including thousands who have HIV or AIDS. The measures, Senate Bills 2155 and 1925, are awaiting a Senate floor vote.

Reedy, who said he has been attending the annual HIV/AIDS Lobby Day since 2005, is deaf and has been HIV-positive for almost seven years.

It's important to spend time advocating for people with AIDS and HIV, Reedy said, adding: "The power really resides in the people."

About 40,000 to 42,000 people in Illinois are living with HIV or AIDS, and one-fourth of them don't know it, said Christina Henry of Peoria Heights, who serves on the board of the Minority AIDS Awareness Council.

"The biggest problem with treating AIDS and prevention is the stigma," she said. "It's 100 percent eliminate-able."

Reedy, Henry and other advocates congregated in the Capitol rotunda for a rally, then dispersed to speak with individual lawmakers.

During the rally, Rep. Greg Harris praised the crowd for making its demands known to lawmakers.

"If you don't ask down here, you don't get," said Harris, a Chicago Democrat who is the legislature's only openly gay member.

Sen. David Koehler, D-Peoria, told the crowd he intends to try again next year to get lawmakers to approve legislation that would implement a practice called "expedited partner therapy."

Referred to as "EPT," it means treating the infected partner of someone with a sexually transmitted disease even when the partner has not been diagnosed through a medical exam.

Last month, Koehler's bill on the subject stalled in a Senate committee. That bill would have targeted people who have chlamydia or gonorrhea.

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