

AIDS Foundation

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AFC Congratulates U.S. Senator Roland Burris

Group Urges Sen. Burris to Champion Healthcare Reform and HIV Prevention

The AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) congratulates the Honorable Roland Burris for becoming the junior U.S. Senator from Illinois to serve the remainder of the term vacated by President Barack Obama.

“Illinois AIDS advocates look forward to working closely with Senator Burris to fulfill President Obama’s comprehensive plans to aggressively fight HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and abroad,” said AFC President/CEO Mark Ishaug. “As the sole African-American in the U.S. Senate, Mr. Burris has a unique opportunity to educate his colleagues in Congress about the ongoing crisis of HIV/AIDS in the U.S., which disproportionately affects people of color.”

Sen. Burris has publicly stated his intentions to continue championing Obama’s policy positions (http://www.aidschicago.org/pdf/2009/adv_trib_burris.pdf) as a member of the U.S. Senate, which is welcome news for AIDS advocates.

President Obama has a long history (http://www.aidschicago.org/advocacy/news_11_5_08.php) of support for the fight against HIV/AIDS. Shortly after the President took the oath of office, the White House posted detailed information online (http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/civil_rights/) about the Obama Administration’s priorities, which include development of a national AIDS strategy, shepherding national healthcare reform, and decreasing rates of HIV transmission in the U.S. The President also supports comprehensive and age-appropriate sex education and lifting the ban on federal funding for proven-effective needle exchange services.

Sen. Burris’ distinguished career in Illinois politics offers clues to some of the issues he may champion as a member of the U.S. Senate. During his unsuccessful 2002 bid for Illinois governor, Burris responded to AFC’s non-partisan candidate questionnaire (http://www.aidschicago.org/pdf/2002_primary_questionnaire.pdf), which posed 11 HIV/AIDS-related questions to candidates seeking statewide office. Nearly three-fourths of Mr. Burris’ responses were in full agreement with AFC’s positions. Notably, he responded in agreement with AFC that healthcare should be addressed as a basic human

right. He agreed that Medicaid ought to be extended to cover income-eligible individuals who are HIV-positive but not yet disabled.

On HIV prevention, Burris agreed with AFC in support of comprehensive and age-appropriate sex education. While indicating support for increased substance abuse treatment funding, he differed with AFC on the issue of sterile syringe access, indicating opposition to sterile syringe availability programs designed to prevent HIV transmission among injection drug users and their family members.

A 2003 state law to increase access to sterile syringes is widely credited with the 40% reduction (http://www.aidschicago.org/pdf/2008/injection_stats.pdf) in injection-related HIV diagnoses in Illinois from 2003 to 2006. The science is so overwhelming in support of the public health merits of sterile syringe access that Congressman **Jose Serrano** (D-NY) recently introduced legislation (<http://capwiz.com/aidschicago/issues/alert/?alertid=12435971>) in the U.S. House to end the decade-old ban on federal funding for needle exchange. Illinois Congressman **Phil Hare** and **Jesse Jackson, Jr.** and Congresswoman **Jan Schakowsky** are among the 35 current co-sponsors of the legislation.

“AIDS advocates are prepared to seize this moment to work with Congress and President Obama to improve public health outcomes in the U.S.,” said AFC Vice President David Ernesto Munar. “AFC looks forward to working with Senator Burris and the rest of the Illinois congressional delegation to champion a wide range of reforms needed to embolden the fight against HIV/AIDS domestically and internationally.”

Founded by community activists and physicians in 1985, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is a catalyst for local, national, and international action on HIV/AIDS.

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