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State lawmaker wants to let prison inmates buy condoms to prevent spread of HIV

Posted by Ashley Rueff at 3:50 p.m.

SPRINGFIELD---Illinois prisoners would be allowed to buy condoms as a way to protect against HIV under a measure backed by a House committee today.

Even though sexual activity is banned in state prisons, condoms should be made available to deter HIV infections between inmates who ignore the ban, said Rep. Monique Davis (D-Chicago), the bill's sponsor.

“Safe sex is talked about every place except inside the prison,” Davis said.

The legislation has gone nowhere twice before and it still faces long odds to become Illinois law. But today four Democrats on the House Human Services Committee voted to send the measure to the full House for consideration. Three Republicans on the panel voted against.

Some lawmakers worried that condoms could be turned into weapons to strangle a person.

Sergio Molina, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Corrections, testified the state invests resources in educating inmates about the risks of HIV and that making condoms available would “send the wrong signal” because sex is prohibited in prison.

Rev. Doris Green, spokeswoman for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, said prisoners who contract HIV wind up infecting the general population when they go home to their families. She said HIV within prisons is a problem because of its prevalence, citing a 2006 U.S. Department of Justice report that said AIDS is three times as prevalent in prisoners as in the general population.

On average, about 455 inmates are HIV positive at any given time within state prisons, Molina said. The Illinois inmate population is about 45,500, and HIV tests are made available for inmates but are not mandated, according to a prison official.