

# AIDS Foundation OF CHICAGO

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## **Vote NO on HB 255 (Flowers) Mandated/Forced HIV Testing of Prisoners Will Do Little to Address Prison HIV**

The AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) opposes mandated HIV testing, also known as forced testing, in state correctional institutions. HB 255 would force all inmates to be tested, **without their consent**, upon intake and prior to release in all Illinois Department of Corrections facilities.

AFC opposes HB 255, Mandated/Forced HIV Testing of Prisoners, because:

- **Mandated/forced testing is an ineffective strategy that *will not reduce risk or improve healthcare among prisoners*.** Mandated HIV testing will force inmates to learn their HIV status, but will not educate them on strategies to reduce the risk of contracting or spreading the virus. HIV is spread by unprotected sex and sharing needles, but mandatory testing does nothing to change this behavior among inmates. The best public health strategy is repeated offers of voluntary testing with risk reduction counseling.
- **Mandated/forced testing is a wasteful use of scarce public resources, and represents unsound public policy.** HB 255 would cost \$233 million over 10 years (fiscal note filed 3/1/05). Mandated/forced HIV testing of inmates is consistently opposed by public health and corrections experts as unsound, ineffective public policy. The National Commission on Correctional Health Care, composed of 36 national organizations representing the fields of health, law, and corrections, recommends that “voluntary testing...should be available to persons who request it.” The Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois Public Health Association, Chicago Department of Public Health and other experts all oppose mandated/forced HIV testing.

**Instead, all inmates should be provided culturally competent, peer-based HIV prevention education and repeatedly offered voluntary HIV counseling and testing services.** In California, almost half the inmates offered voluntary HIV tests by trained peer educators took the test and learned their status. Testing strategies must empower individuals to make the right choices for themselves, their family members, and their community. A comprehensive, voluntary testing program engages inmates in their own healthcare, which benefits individuals and the entire community.

For more information, contact Director of State Affairs John Peller at (312) 922-2322.