

**Testimony of
Brent E. Adams
at Chicago City Council
Public Hearing
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My name is Brent Adams. I am an attorney and the policy director for Citizen Action/Illinois. Until recently, I was a policy associate at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago and have played a leadership role in the campaign to increase city funding for HIV prevention by \$1 million.

Since our campaign launched over ten months ago, I have personally met with most of you, and a majority of you joined our cause. For that, I thank you. I can honestly say that it has been a pleasure getting to know the members of this body and, although I will miss working with you on this important issue, I look forward to working on this and other healthcare-related issues at the state and federal level. I am especially grateful to Alderman Tunney for introducing an ordinance providing for the \$1 million increase and for making me as proud as I could be to be a resident of the 44th Ward.

Over the past ten months, I have barraged you, the mayor, members of his cabinet and his staff, and the public with statistics that I have long since committed to memory: over 11,000 AIDS deaths in Chicago; 1,000 new infections each year; 22,000 Chicagoans currently living with HIV; over 60% of the City's new HIV and AIDS cases among African-Americans.

Today, I'm going to speak briefly about something slightly different. I am going to try to give you some idea of the face behind the numbers.

People living with and at-risk for HIV are not society's "throw-aways" – not people who can be blithely stricken from society's membership list. I learned that *I* was HIV-positive in 1999, and yet, I am still a decent person and a good citizen. The same holds true for the other HIV-positive men and women who have joined me in this fight. We are not those whom society could just as well do without.

It has been suggested recently that we are just another special interest group clamoring for our piece of the pie. On the contrary, many of us at the forefront of this campaign, like me, are already infected with HIV. We are fighting to prevent the infection *in others*. These desperately needed funds will not benefit *us* in any direct way whatsoever. We are fighting on behalf of all of those in this room and in our city who are not infected but who could be if we don't step up to the plate and do more to stop the spread of HIV. In this way, our campaign is a model of altruism. It is driven not by *self-interest* but by the *public* interest.

Simply put, there are those in this city who, without this funding, will become infected with HIV; many will get sick, and some will die. Policy makers are rarely presented with such a clear-cut choice. Don't increase city funding for HIV prevention for my sake; do it for the potentially thousands of men, women, and children in Chicago who are not yet infected with HIV and who have no idea of the value of HIV prevention but for whom that value is immeasurable. Thank you.