

Good Afternoon. My name is Zephyr Beason, Assistant Project Director from the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County and The Core Center. Our patients, young people ages twelve to twenty-four, receive primary health and mental health care from a comprehensive staff of physicians, nurse practitioners, psychologists, and case managers. The Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine's staff specializes in HIV/AIDS treatment with almost two-hundred adolescents and young adults currently enrolled in care. Recently, a sudden increase in young people seeking HIV treatment occurred within the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine over a short period of time.

Since January, forty-five new patients, between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four, enrolled in our HIV/AIDS treatment program! Even more frightening, one-third of them presented with an AIDS diagnosis. These forty-five young people acquired HIV through having unprotected sex with someone infected with HIV. Now they are faced with managing HIV, which is extremely complicated and requires intense compassion and flexibility. Coincidentally, we are witnessing HIV increasingly becoming an epidemic among young people, during a time when our lawmakers may increase funding.

A research grant awarded to the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, Connect-to-Protect, is a multi-site research initiative with the goal of forming community-researcher partnerships to prevent future HIV infection among youth and young adults. Using data obtained from the Chicago Department of Public Health we have created maps of Chicago that highlight communities with the most cases of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. For your reference, we have copies of these maps and please see for yourself that to some degree, every community and zip code has young people impacted with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. Today, we are sharing some of the preliminary findings with you, our City Council, to ask for your support to increase HIV prevention funding by 1 million dollars.

Of the three-hundred and thirty-six newly diagnosed cases of HIV among twelve to twenty-four year olds reported for the years 1999-2001, the north, west, and south sides of Chicago are largely impacted. For instance, twenty-seven cases were reported from zip code 60640 near the Uptown and Edgewater community areas. Each zip code 60612 and 60608 shared by several west side communities has twenty-one reported HIV cases. Ten aldermanic wards share zip codes with these hotspots for HIV. Most of the aldermen of those wards have signed onto the campaign for HIV prevention funding, but a few have not.

Between the years 1999-2000, one-hundred and thirteen newly diagnosed AIDS cases were reported among twelve to twenty-four years olds. Due to the progressive drug treatments and the normal progression of HIV into AIDS, these numbers are smaller than newly diagnosed HIV cases. For most community areas, less than five young people were reported with an AIDS diagnosis. The only exceptions were Austin where more than eight cases and South Lawndale where six AIDS cases were reported. All of the Austin aldermen support this campaign, but none have signed on from the South Lawndale community.

The presence of an STI confers risk three to four times fold for acquiring HIV during unprotected sexual acts. Critical markers for risky sexual activity are the 21,848 Chlamydia and 13,610 Gonorrhea cases reported for 2000-2001 among 12-24 year olds. Comparably, youth are leading with the majority of Gonorrhea and Chlamydia cases across the nation! In Chicago, the communities hardest impacted by Chlamydia and Gonorrhea were Austin, Lawndale, and Englewood. Again, most aldermen from these areas have signed on to the campaign, but some have not.

HIV prevention is essential to reducing transmission among young people. These young people are our children, brothers, sisters, and neighbors. Youth-friendly HIV prevention, education, and health services are necessary to bring this epidemic to a stop. These services should include information about reasons to postpone sexual activity, safer sex options, and negotiation skills. In 2001, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that nationally of the 40,000 new HIV infections, 20,000 or half occurred in young people under twenty-five. Unfortunately, many people are infected with HIV and do not know.

The million dollar increase in funding will provide opportunities to reduce future infections on the north, west, and south side communities that currently have the greatest needs. Thank you for allowing me present and please help to Connect-to-Protect Chicago! Our youth are the future of our great city!