

State of Emergency for Chicago's Black Folks

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Ladies and gentlemen of the Chicago City Council thank you for this opportunity to address this ongoing health disparity especially among Black youth, men and women.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and its agent the Human Immune Deficiency Virus have migrated from the so-called gay ghetto of North Chicago to the real ghettos of West and South Chicago.

Black citizens in the City of Chicago are facing a state of emergency regarding HIV/AIDS and this requires a state of prevention. The AIDS Foundation of Chicago's in the Windy City Times October 8, 2003 issue stated Blacks comprise 65% AIDS cases and 61% HIV cases. People of color are at even higher percentage levels.

While we often measure our responses by epidemiological and statistical data we need not stray far from the real challenge –the political will to set policy that benefits the citizens of Chicago. This august body has a duty to provide for the common protection and health of all of its citizens. We should reflect on the recent meningitis scare and note the marshaling of community and government resources to meet the need.

Within a week the health department responded. Why because the resources were made available. The free vaccinations sites provided more than 14,000 citizens with access to services, information, and a sense of protection.

To date only six men were diagnosed with meningitis and sadly three died. Where is the political will to address the HIV pandemic?

Prevention and early detection of HIV will save lives. While the new technology of HIV Rapid Testing is being made available there must also be viable and responsible community based organizations that can assist the Chicago Health Department in its quest to reduce new infections of HIV among Black and Latino populations.

Minority men of color remain at the greatest risk for this disease. A great deal of these men is engaging in behaviors with social taboos and stigma that decrease the communities' ability to talk about sex, drugs and HIV.

Black citizens in the City of Chicago are facing a state of emergency. What will be your response?

Prevention is one key in the health department arsenal that can diminish the impact of AIDS by early diagnosis. Early treatment with antiretroviral therapy is the other. Now it is time for the City of Chicago to secure the health rights of its Black and Latino citizens. Our greatest weapons in this fight are knowledge, attitudes and resources.

I am living with AIDS and as member of the Black same gender loving community disproportionately impacted by this global pandemic we call upon our government to take appropriate and targeted action to combat the epidemic in our communities. We should expect from this increase in funding the following:

1. 80% of the funding should be earmarked to minority agencies who can address HIV education, primary and secondary prevention needs of minority same gender loving men,
2. expansion of HIV testing by minority community based organizations on the West and South side,
3. access to Chicago Public Schools to provide comprehensive sex education that covers abstinence, contraception, and HIV prevention especially to sexual minority youth of color,

HIV has touched every ward, socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, age, gender and political affiliation in this city. Every alderman on this City Council should support the HIV Prevention Amendment by Tom Tunney to increase at least by 1 million dollars the 2004 HIV budget. Black citizens in Chicago are facing a state of emergency. We need a state of prevention. Black men who are same gender loving, gay or bisexual join with me in support of this additional funding to address this devastating disease. The domestic terrorism of HIV/AIDS must end. What will be your response?