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Thank you, Chairman and committee members. The Chicago Chapter of the National Organization for Women (Chicago NOW) is a multi-issue advocacy organization that works to better the lives of women and girls throughout Chicago. We are here today because HIV infection is increasing in women at a rapid rate. Chicago NOW supports increased funding for HIV/ AIDS to attempt to ameliorate the burden of this horrible disease among women. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) women represented 30% of new HIV cases in 2001<sup>1</sup>. The number of women living with AIDS has doubled since 1991 from 13% of all AIDS cases to over 25% in 2001.

However, if one were to take a poll of young women today and asked them what their biggest health concerns are, the responses would probably include concerns about breast cancer, heart attacks, lung cancer and perhaps violence. What most women don't know is that in 2000, HIV/AIDS was the fourth leading cause of death among women ages 25 – 44. Shockingly, in the same year, HIV/AIDS was the number one cause of death for African American women ages 25-34.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, although comprising about twelve percent of the female population, African American women accounted for sixty-four percent of new HIV infections in 2001.<sup>3</sup>

Among teens the increase in HIV cases in girls is astonishing. Girls, ages 13-19, account for 57 percent of new HIV infections reported in 2001 and among adults ages 20-24, young women accounted for almost half of new HIV infections.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that HIV is not a disease that is relegated to only risky behavior such as injection drug use. In fact, 75% of young women ages 13-24 were infected with HIV through heterosexual sexual contact.<sup>5</sup>

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is a compelling problem in Chicago. There were 1,935 women living with AIDS in Chicago in 2001, the seventh highest ranking of women with AIDS in large metropolitan areas of the U.S.<sup>6</sup>

According to the 2003 Kaiser Family Foundation's Study, *A National Survey of Women and Their Sexual Health*, 34% of women of reproductive age have never been tested for HIV. Sixty-six percent of these women say they did not get tested because they don't think they are at risk and 21% replied they did not seek HIV tests because they did not know how to go about it.<sup>7</sup>

The face of HIV is changing. Today it looks more and more like a young woman, specifically an African American woman. Women of all ages are bearing the burden of this deadly disease, many of whom never thought they were at risk. If there is a silver lining in the insidious HIV virus, it is that disease transmission is preventable, but there needs to be increased outreach and education to women, especially young women to alert them that HIV is their problem too. Money for HIV education and treatment targeted at women at risk is imperative; in fact their lives depend on it. For these reasons, Chicago NOW supports increased HIV/AIDS funding for women in Chicago.

Thank you,

Jennifer Koehler  
President  
Chicago NOW

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Nation Vital Statistics System, *National Vital Statistics Reports, Leading Causes of Death for 2000*. Vol. 50, No. 16, September 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Nation Vital Statistics System, *National Vital Statistics Reports, Leading Causes of Death for 2000*. Vol. 50, No. 16, September 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HIV/AIDS Update: A Glance at the Epidemic*, February 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report*, Vol. 13. No. 2

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report*, Vol. 13. No. 2

<sup>6</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Key Facts: Women and HIV/AIDS*, October 2003

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.