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AIDS Advocates Praise Illinois House Vote to Repeal Discriminatory HIV Law

Passage of HB 61 will encourage HIV testing among teens at risk of HIV

The effort to repeal Illinois's outdated HIV principal reporting law took a major step forward this afternoon when the Illinois House of Representatives voted 61-55-1 in support of Representative La Shawn Ford's HB 61, which repeals the principal notification sections of Illinois' Sexually Transmissible Disease Control Act. The bill next moves to the Senate.

"Rep. Ford has sponsored this bill for the past five years, and his leadership and persistence have finally paid off," said Ann Fisher, executive director of AIDS Legal Council of Chicago (ALCC). "AIDS Legal Council of Chicago and AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) are grateful for Rep. Ford's support and thank his colleagues in the House who voted for the bill."

Illinois is the only state with a law mandating that when a state or local health department receives a report of an HIV-positive student, that child's school principal must be notified. The principal then has authority to share this information with the superintendent, school nurse, classroom teacher, and "other persons as may be necessary." Recognizing the stigma involved with singling out HIV-positive students, a coalition of organizations has been working for many years to repeal this outdated, vague, and discriminatory law, with partners from the ACLU of

Illinois, AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Lurie Children's Hospital, and advocates throughout the state.

ALCC supervisory attorney, Colleen Boraca, stated, "Over twenty-five years after this law's passage in 1987, it is well known that HIV is not transmitted through biting, sports, or other casual contact. School personnel are trained to treat all fluids with universal precautions, further making this law unnecessary."

"Illinois has moved one step closer to parity with the other 49 states. We applaud Illinois for protecting the medical privacy of Illinois families and students affected by HIV," said Ramon Gardenhire, AFC's director of government relations. "We urge the Illinois Senate to take up this issue quickly and remove this barrier to HIV testing of youth."

Ann Fisher added that adolescents have the fastest-growing rate of new HIV infections in Illinois, but many refuse testing fearing their status will become known at their school.

The bill proceeds to the Illinois Senate, where it must be called for a final vote by the end of the legislative session on May 31, 2013.

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Founded 25 years ago, AIDS Legal Council of Chicago works to preserve, promote, and protect the legal rights of men, women, children, and families in the metropolitan Chicago area impacted by HIV and AIDS. The Council provides free direct legal services to people in need, educates the public about HIV-related legal issues, and advocates for social policies that ensure fair treatment for all people affected by HIV and AIDS. www.aidslegal.com.

Founded in 1985 by community activists and physicians, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is a catalyst for local, national, and international action against HIV/AIDS. www.aidschicago.org