Good morning. I’m Rev. Doris Green of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago.

I want to thank and congratulate Commissioner Gainer for her hard work on this issue. She has quickly become one of the strongest public health champions on the County Board.

I also want to thank Sheriff Dart, Dr. Puises (“pwee-sis”) and Dr. Hart and the leadership and staff of the Cermak Health Services, and everyone at the Department of Facilities Management for their hard work getting this project off the ground.

Sunday is National HIV Testing Day – a reminder that everyone should know their HIV status. It is particularly important that people behind bars know their HIV status, because they are at least 3-5 times more likely to have HIV than the general population.

Some of the groups with the highest rates of HIV come through the jail—African American and Latino gay men and men who have sex
with men; women of color, and particularly African American women; and heterosexual black and Latino men.

If we are to make a difference in the AIDS epidemic, we must reach people at risk where they are, and sometimes that’s behind bars.

If people in jail have HIV but don’t know it, they can’t get help when the leave and go home. They won’t know to take precautions to prevent HIV transmission. This testing program is an essential missing piece that is a tremendous step towards fighting HIV in Cook County.

What happens behind bars matters to the community, and to people in the community. I thank everyone here today for making the health of detainees and people in our neighborhoods a priority.

There hasn’t been much good news in the public health field lately. Nationally, public health departments have laid off nearly 23,000 workers and seen almost $300 million in budget cuts. But thanks to Commissioner Gainer and everyone at Cook County, we have a new public health intervention that will save lives and reduce costs.
It’s even more amazing that Commissioner Gainer and her colleagues managed to reallocate existing funding to voluntary HIV and STD testing. This project won’t cost county taxpayers an extra dime, and it will save money in the long-run.

Almost everyone gets out of jail sooner or later. For nearly 10 years, I’ve been involved in a model program operating at Cook County Jail and in Illinois prisons that helps people with HIV emerge from prison and jail and successfully reintegrate into the community.

The goal of the program is simple—to stabilize the lives of former inmates by linking them to medical care, housing, job training, substance abuse treatment and other services. Most importantly, there’s a seamless handoff to a case manager in the community to make plans for a successful future.

Some of Chicagoland’s best corrections experts are part of this program, including the Ruth M. Rothstein CORE Center, Christian Community Health Center, Haymarket, Men & Women in Prison Ministries, Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago, and others. We’re grateful to the Illinois Department of Public Health for supporting the program.
Does this program work? Absolutely. Our recidivism rate—the rate at which former inmates return to prison or jail—is three times lower than the general corrections population. That saves the state over a million dollars a year, and it saves Cook County money too.

The reentry program also reduces the likelihood that people with HIV will transmit the virus to others. The HIV and corrections program is great for individuals with HIV and good for the community.

The reentry program has been in place for a number of years, but there was a missing piece. Inmates had to ask for an HIV test. The voluntary HIV testing program that’s being announced today will make the offer of HIV testing automatic to everyone who comes into the jail.

Thank you, and I’m going to turn things back to ___________(Commissioner Gainer)