

## **Hundreds of Illinois AIDS Advocates Rally in Rotunda of State Capitol for 6th Annual AIDS Lobby Day**

Leaders from across the state call on state legislators to increase funding for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP)

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., March 1 /PRNewswire/ -- More than 200 leaders in the fight against AIDS from around the state gathered today in Springfield for the 6th annual "Caring for Our Communities" Illinois HIV/AIDS Lobby Day. Armed with empty pill bottles and personal stories, advocates called on Governor Rod Blagojevich and the General Assembly to take action to keep the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) solvent in 2007.

Illinois State Senator Mattie Hunter and Illinois State Representatives Sara Feigenholtz, Connie Howard and Larry McKeon joined AIDS advocates in the rotunda of the Capitol Building to kick off the day's events.

"ADAP provides life-saving medications to thousands of people living with HIV and AIDS in Illinois," Mark Ishaug, Executive Director of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC), said of the Lobby Day legislative priority. "The AIDS Foundation of Chicago commends Governor Blagojevich for including a \$2 million increase for ADAP in his FY2007 budget, but the program needs at least \$3 million if it is to continue providing medications to HIV patients."

ADAP serves over 3,000 people in Illinois each year and the number continues to grow. There are currently an estimated 40,000 to 42,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Illinois, and an estimated 1,600 new infections occur each year.

To maintain continuity of care for current ADAP clients and help more people needing assistance, the AFC is calling for an increase in funding. Without new funding to sustain the program, increases in enrollment, program utilization, and medication costs will cause a reduction in ADAP services.

"Without access to antiviral and antibiotic medications, my doctor gave me 6 months to live because of an opportunistic infection," said Keith Green, a leader in the fight for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in the African-American gay community. "The medications I received through ADAP saved my life. Everyone deserves the right to be well."

Advocates also emphasized the importance of adequate funding for HIV/AIDS services. In addition to a \$3 million increase for ADAP, they will call on their legislators to increase the appropriation to expand HIV prevention services.

In conjunction with the Lobby Day activities, the AFC presented Chicagoan Patrice Dean with the 2nd annual Mary Dixon Advocacy Award at a reception the evening of February 28th. Patrice was selected by a committee of leaders in the HIV/AIDS advocacy

community from across the state for overcoming her 30-year drug addiction and becoming one of Illinois' most active advocates in the HIV/AIDS community.

"I am honored to be associated with an award given to someone like Patrice," said Mary Dixon, long-time ACLU Illinois legislative director, for whom the award is named.

Patrice is out there everyday dealing with her own HIV status and helping others in all aspects of their lives. She is truly making a difference in her community."

"Caring for Our Communities" is organized by the AFC and sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline, Abbott Laboratories, Boehringer-Ingelheim, Carolyn Grisko & Associates Inc., Gilead Sciences, Hoffman - LaRoche Ltd., The Phoenix Center, C&M Pharmacy, Fifth Street Renaissance, and Abraham Lincoln Hotel.

Founded in 1985 by community activists and physicians, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is a local and national leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The AFC collaborates with community organizations to develop and improve HIV/AIDS services; fund and coordinate prevention, care, and advocacy projects; and champion effective, compassionate HIV/AIDS policy.

SOURCE AIDS Foundation of Chicago