



Date: May 21, 2020

To: Chairperson Gabel, Minority Spokesperson Demmer and the IL House Human Services Appropriations Committee Members

From: Timothy Jackson, Director of Government Relations, AIDS Foundation Chicago

Subject: Written Testimony Regarding FY20 Supplemental Funding and FY21 Budget

On March 1, 2020, President Donald Trump declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a national emergency with the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic ten days later. As of the date of this letter, there are more than 1,547,353 confirmed positive COVID-19 cases nationwide with 100,418 cases and 4,525 deaths here in the state. While the curve is bending and new COVID-19 cases and deaths are slowing, the public health emergency continues.

During this crisis, AIDS Foundation Chicago (AFC) is very concerned about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Illinoisans living with or vulnerable to HIV and other chronic conditions, especially those in the Black, Latinx and LGBTQ communities. To help address the impact of COVID-19 on these populations and communities and continue our collective work in Illinois to [Get to Zero](#), AFC requests \$57 million in additional funding to meet basic health care – including HIV prevention and treatment services – and human needs of people living with HIV, people who use PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), and people vulnerable to HIV. Additionally, AFC requests a \$1 million investment in Black-led and Latinx-led HIV community-based organizations in Illinois to help them weather the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To be clear, without this funding, AFC is deeply concerned that people living with HIV, those who take PrEP, and those vulnerable to HIV will see their lives needlessly destabilized further. The consequences of inaction for these populations and the Black and Latinx people that are overrepresented in HIV and COVID-19 diagnoses in IL include increased housing instability and rates of homelessness; increased hunger and food insecurity; and increased likelihood of falling out of ongoing healthcare treatment, including HIV care. At a time when our state leadership has already taken bold proactive steps to support ending the HIV epidemic in IL ([GTZ IL](#)), now is the time to strengthen this commitment by making these critical additional investments for those living with or impacted by HIV.

The remainder of the below lays out current HIV data as well as what we know thus far from recent COVID-19 data, and the intersection of populations impacted by both viruses.

Black and Latinx people in Illinois are already disproportionately impacted by HIV. As of June 2019, 46% of people living with HIV in Illinois are Black and 19% Latinx. In addition, of new HIV cases, nearly 75% are within the Black and Latinx communities, and if current trends continue, one in two gay Black men will become HIV-positive by age 40. Among heterosexual women, Black women account for more than 73% of HIV cases among women across the state. In addition, while 56% of people living with HIV in Illinois were virally suppressed, this percentage is below the national viral suppression average of 61% and much lower than the National HIV/AIDS Strategy viral suppression goal of 90% (a person with HIV who takes HIV medicine as prescribed and gets and stays virally suppressed or undetectable can stay healthy and has effectively no risk of sexually transmitting HIV to HIV-negative partners). Lastly, only 27% of people who would benefit from PrEP in Illinois have been prescribed it and the majority of Illinoisans on PrEP are not Black or Latinx.

In order to meet the priorities of the [Getting to Zero Illinois \(GTZ-IL\)](#) plan, the state must further its commitment to HIV services and programs that will lead to the continued reduction of new HIV cases, especially when prioritized in communities where the need is greatest. To address the startling health disparities caused by HIV among communities of color, AFC is strongly advocating for an increase of state funding for HIV treatment and prevention services including HIV testing, PrEP and the African American HIV/AIDS Response Act in the amount of \$2.1 million. In addition, AFC is requesting \$900,000 in new state funding to address the growing rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (i.e. Chlamydia; Gonorrhea; & Syphilis) across the state. In 2018, STI diagnoses in Illinois continued a concerning upward trend (77,325 - Chlamydia; 25,422 - Gonorrhea; 1,408 - Primary and Secondary Syphilis).

Black and Latinx Illinoisans who are already over-represented in those living with or impacted by HIV are now also over-represented in those diagnosed and those losing their life to COVID-19. While Black people make up 15% of Illinois' population, they currently account for 17% of Illinois' confirmed COVID-19 cases and 32% of Illinoisans dying from COVID-19. For the Latinx community, we know that there is likely underreporting of COVID-19 cases due to continued fear of government and lack of data from health care providers; nonetheless, recent data indicate that while Latinx people make up 17% of Illinois' population, they account for 30% of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

AFC firmly believes that the state's response to the communities hardest hit by COVID-19 should be reflected in a commitment to fund health care and essential services, including transportation, food, rent, utility assistance, and unlimited minutes, texts, and data (for cell phones to contact loved ones and access healthcare). Allocating supplemental funding of \$57 million for the COVID-19 related needs of people living with or vulnerable to HIV and an additional \$1 million for the Black and Latinx-led community-based

organizations who support them will ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities do not fall through the cracks during this global pandemic.

I hope that we can count on your support to increase state funding for HIV and STI services and provide equitable COVID-19 relief for Black and Latinx Illinoisans living with or vulnerable to HIV. With your support, we can build healthier communities in Illinois! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at tjackson@aidschicago.org or via telephone at (256) 200-8878.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy S. Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'T'.

Timothy S. Jackson
Director of Government Relations
AIDS Foundation Chicago