

# Press Release...



*From State Representative La Shawn K. Ford*

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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## **Ford Passes Bipartisan Measure to Increase Testing for HIV**

**SPRINGFIELD, IL** – With the goal of increasing screening for HIV in the state of Illinois, state Rep. La Shawn K. Ford, D-Chicago, recently passed legislation unanimously through the House that would make changes in the AIDS Confidentiality Act to remove noted barriers in testing for HIV in Illinois and also extend the life of the African American HIV/AIDS Response Act.

House Bill 1004 clarifies requirements for medical providers who want to conduct routine HIV screening. In 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released its Revised Recommendations for HIV Testing, which advises providers in healthcare settings to routinely screen everyone between the ages of 13-64 for HIV. In 2013, the United States Preventive Services Task Force gave HIV screening for adults a Grade A recommendation. Screening for HIV decreases the numbers of those unaware that they have HIV, identifies people earlier in their disease state (vs. with an AIDS diagnosis), and decreases the number of babies born with HIV. In doing so, persons diagnosed with HIV can obtain life-saving treatment and are less likely to spread HIV to their partners. Once on antiretroviral treatment, there is a greater than 90% reduction in HIV transmission to sex partners.

Even though Illinois law was revised in 2008 by legislation introduced by Rep. Ford to reflect the CDC's recommendations, it was found by many community stakeholders that further changes in the law were needed to remove notable barriers to HIV screening. In a series of 5 HIV Community Collaboration meetings of more than 45 community agencies over the last year and a half, and in a similar series of subcommittee meetings, stakeholders came together to achieve consensus and to propose language that would address the barriers to HIV screening that were being confronted in the actual practice of doing HIV testing. In addition, community stakeholders also recognized the importance of extending the life of the African American HIV/AIDS Response Act, which was to sunset in 2016.

“Our government was founded on community initiatives,” said Ford. “This bill is the work of what our government has been founded on. The passage of this bill brings me great pride to have the trust and the responsibility from so many community organizations to carry such an important measure to help with a problem that continues to be a challenge throughout the state.”

As the Co-Chair of Rep. Ford's HIV Community Collaboration Subcommittee on HIV Screening, Monique Rucker, Senior Epidemiologist for the HIV Program at Sinai Health System Chicago said, “We are excited that today the House passed an important piece of legislation reducing barriers for screening people for HIV that will help agencies like Sinai who are dedicated to serving communities in Illinois. Eight years ago, Representative Ford set out to implement the CDC's recommendations for HIV testing in health care settings, and today, with the help of many community stakeholders and the Illinois legislature's vote, we are closer to being able to diagnose the thousands of Illinoisans who are unaware of their status and get them into care.”

“Along with the hard work done by so many community stakeholders, we also have to acknowledge the contributions and advice of Dr. Bernard Branson, Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, and TB Prevention of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, whose presentation at one of our meetings and on-going communications were so helpful and encouraging,” said Dr. Thomas Huggett, Ford's Volunteer Health Adviser.

House Bill 1004 passed the House unanimously and now awaits consideration in the Senate.

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