

Press Release...



From State Representative La Shawn K. Ford

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HIV Community Collaboration's Bill to Increase Testing for HIV Signed by Governor

Community Collaboration started and led by Rep. Ford

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Legislation aimed at increasing screening for HIV in the state of Illinois, which was initiated by a grassroots HIV Community Collaboration organized and led by state Rep. La Shawn K. Ford, D-Chicago, was signed into law by Governor Rauner today. “I would like to thank Governor Rauner for signing this important piece of legislation which will remove notable barriers in testing for HIV in Illinois, and also extends the African American HIV/AIDS Response Act,” said Ford. “We have a long way to go in our fight against HIV, but this is a great step in that fight, with the goal of getting to zero.”

Public Act 99-0054, previously 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, the highest 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 to 2026, which was scheduled to sunset in 2016.

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“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 in the HIV Community Collaboration 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 the General Assembly previously passed, and the governor has now signed, this important piece of legislation into law, 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, the Illinois General Assembly, and Governor Rauner’s signature, 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.

"We are grateful to the General Assembly, Governor Rauner and for the leadership of Rep. La Shawn Ford for the passage of Public Act 99-0054," said Kim L. Hunt, Executive Director of Affinity and member of the Service Providers Improvement Network (SPIN), a coalition of 15 organizations involved with HIV prevention work in African American communities. "The extension of the African American HIV/AIDS Response Act helps ensure that funds, if available, are directed to individuals in the communities that are hardest hit by the virus. One in two people newly diagnosed with HIV in Illinois is African American. Rep. Ford has been a dedicated leader in the fight against HIV and AIDS and we look forward to continuing this fight with him, other members of the General Assembly, Governor Rauner, and other stakeholders."

“I would also like to thank the AIDS Foundation of Chicago and community organizers Ben Montgomery and Marc Loveless and others who were in Springfield to fight for passage of the bill,” said Ford. “Their experience in Springfield was very valuable. I also want to thank my colleague Senator Emil Jones III for helping to pass the bill in the Senate.”

Public Act 99-0054

(<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/billstatus.asp?DocNum=1004&GAID=13&GA=99&DocTypeID=HB&LegID=85483&SessionID=88>) passed both the House and the Senate unanimously in the spring legislative session and was signed into law by the governor on July 16, 2015.

For more information, contact one of Ford’s constituent service offices: 816 S. Oak Park Avenue in Oak Park at [708-445-3673](tel:708-445-3673), 4800 W. Chicago Avenue in Chicago at [773-378-5902](tel:773-378-5902) or in the Stratton Office Building in Springfield at [217-782-5962](tel:217-782-5962), or visit www.lashawnford.com.