

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 8, 2008**

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**Coalition of GLBT and HIV/AIDS Groups to Commemorate End of Ban on Syringe Exchange in the District of Columbia**

*Reception Will Also Support Effort to Repeal Federal Ban*

**WASHINGTON**— A coalition comprised of AIDS Action, The AIDS Institute, amFAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, DC Appleseed, Drug Policy Alliance, the Harm Reduction Coalition, the Human Rights Campaign, Physicians for Human Rights, PreventionWorks!, the Washington AIDS Partnership and the Whitman-Walker Clinic, will hold a reception commemorating the end of the Congressional ban on allowing the District of Columbia to use its own locally raised revenue to finance syringe exchange programs. The event, to be held on Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup> at the Rayburn House Office Building, will also serve to advance the effort to end the current ban on using federal dollars to carry out syringe exchange programs.

In addition to celebrating the lifting of the DC Syringe Exchange Funding Ban, the reception will honor the lawmakers and advocates who were instrumental in achieving this important victory for public health and effective HIV prevention.

In 2007, Congress voted to allow the District of Columbia to use local funds to operate syringe exchange programs after a 9 year ban. Syringe exchange programs have been proven to be effective at drastically curbing the spread of HIV and AIDS without encouraging intravenous drug use. Washington, DC, has seen an increase in HIV and AIDS cases that is among the nation's largest.

“With HIV and AIDS threatening public health the end of the ban on the District using its funds to operate syringe exchange programs in Washington is long overdue,” said HRC President Joe Solmonese. “We salute (Congressional leaders) for leading the effort to repeal this harmful policy and urge Congress to end the federal ban.”

“AIDS Action is pleased that, while a decade overdue and thousands of lost lives later, Washington, D.C. can now finally spend its own local tax funds on syringe exchange,” said Ronald Johnson, AIDS Action’s Deputy Executive Director. “Sadly, the ban on using federal funding for syringe exchange is still in place, ignoring scientific studies that show it would save lives and won’t increase drug abuse. Ending the federal ban is also 10 years overdue. We call on Congress to follow its own lead and tremendous success in ending the D.C. ban by ending the federal ban as well.”

The Executive Director of Washington AIDS Partnership, Channing Wickham noted, “With the highest HIV/AIDS rates in the country, the Washington AIDS Partnership is pleased that the District of Columbia will at last be able to spend local tax dollars on this life-saving HIV prevention strategy. After many years of effort by a broad coalition of advocates, it is encouraging to see that common sense and the unquestioned efficacy of syringe exchange to slow the rate of new HIV infections have prevailed.”

"This is not only a victory for HIV prevention in the District of Columbia but a victory for DC home rule." said Carl Schmid, Director of Federal Affairs for The AIDS Institute.

Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton will be honored at the February 13th event along with others who have demonstrated leadership on behalf of syringe exchange programs and the fight against HIV and AIDS.

**Please RSVP by Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup> to Christy at [dclegalintern@aidsaction.org](mailto:dclegalintern@aidsaction.org)**

**WHAT:** Reception commemorating the end of the syringe exchange ban in the District of Columbia

**WHO:** AIDS Action  
The AIDS Institute  
amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research  
DC Appleseed  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Harm Reduction Coalition  
Human Rights Campaign  
PreventionWorks!  
Physicians for Human Rights  
Washington AIDS Partnership  
Whitman-Walker Clinic

**WHEN:** Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>  
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

**WHERE:** Rayburn House Office Building  
Banquet Room 340B