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THE AIDS INSTITUTE COMMENDS HOUSE PASSAGE OF STOP AIDS IN PRISONS ACT

One Component of a Needed National Strategy to Prevent AIDS in the United States

Washington, DC – The AIDS Institute commends the House of Representatives for unanimously passing the *Stop AIDS In Prisons Act of 2007* today and urges its immediate passage in the Senate so that it will soon become the law of the land. Additionally, The AIDS Institute recognizes that providing HIV testing and counseling in our Nation’s prisons is only one piece of a badly needed National AIDS Prevention Strategy that will reduce and end HIV/AIDS in the United States.

The bipartisan *Stop AIDS in Prisons Act of 2007* (H.R. 1943), championed by Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) would provide routine, opt-out HIV testing with pre and post-test counseling to all federal prisoners. All inmates who test positive for HIV/AIDS will receive comprehensive medical treatment, and inmates may request an HIV test without being penalized for a violation of prison rules.

“The need for this legislation is great,” commented Dr. Gene Copello, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “In 2004, the Department of Justice reported that HIV/AIDS prevalence among U.S. prisoners was three times that of the general population. HIV transmission in prisons is an issue that has gone virtually unaddressed by federal lawmakers until recent years. We congratulate and thank Rep. Waters for her leadership on this and so many other HIV/AIDS issues.”

While we applaud passage of this important legislation, The AIDS Institute urges the United States to develop a national comprehensive HIV prevention strategy as part of an overall National Strategy for HIV/AIDS that addresses not only prevention, but care, treatment and research. “With more than 1.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and more than 40,000 new infections each year, this nation must commit to a comprehensive strategic plan,” urged Dr. Copello. HIV/AIDS in the U.S. is particularly devastating the African-American, Latino, gay and other minority and low-income communities.

Since it is estimated that more than 250,000 people living with HIV/AIDS are unaware of their HIV status, HIV testing, including testing in prisons, is critical, but it is only one component of a comprehensive approach to prevent HIV/AIDS. Testing alone will only somewhat reduce the number of new infections; prevention counseling also must be made available in order for testing programs to be effective.

Additionally, someone has to pay for HIV testing. That is why The AIDS Institute urges the Congress to consider Rep. Waters’ *Routine HIV/AIDS Screening Coverage Act* (H.R. 822), which would require individual and group health insurance coverage and group health plans and Federal employees’ health benefit plans to cover routine HIV tests.

The AIDS Institute applauds the action of the House today for passing this important piece of legislation and particularly, the leadership of Rep. Waters. We hope this bill will soon become law so that HIV in our Nation’s prisons will be better addressed. Additionally, we hope the Congress will commit to addressing other HIV prevention and testing issues in a comprehensive manner by demanding that a National HIV/AIDS Strategy be developed and implemented.

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*For more information and to become involved in AIDS advocacy work, please contact
The AIDS Institute at: (202) 835-8373, or by email at: Info@theaidsinstitute.org or www.TheAIDSInstitute.org
The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit and nonpartisan agency that promotes action for social change
through public policy research, advocacy and education.*