September 10, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230 US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221 US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: The “Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018”

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

The AIDS Institute, a national non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and protecting health care access for people living with HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, and other chronic and serious health conditions thanks you for including the “Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018” (S.2579), as part of the “Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018” (S.2680, Sec. 1512). We urge you to quickly pass this bill.

The bipartisan “Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018”, introduced by Senators Tammy Baldwin, Edward Markey, and Todd Young, would provide much needed resources to state and local governments and others to help improve the nation’s response to the growing number of new cases of infectious diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis, due to injection drug use associated with the opioid crisis. It would provide the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with $40 million annually to carry out these activities.

According to recent CDC surveillance data, new cases of hepatitis C (HCV) rose by a staggering 350 percent nationwide between 2010 and 2016. Deaths associated with HCV now surpass deaths associated with all 60 other notifiable infectious diseases combined. While we have been making progress in reducing the number of new HIV infections, including the number of new cases associated with injection drug use, the opioid epidemic can reverse this trend.
Certain communities and areas of the country, including those who are young and living in rural areas, are experiencing increases of HIV due to injection drug use.

The Scott County, Indiana HIV and HCV outbreak cast a spotlight on the risk of rapid transmission of infectious disease among people who inject drugs and the lack of sufficient state and local resources to rapidly respond. The CDC has identified 220 counties across 26 states that are vulnerable to similar outbreaks.

Providing the CDC and its grantees with additional resources for surveillance, testing, and linkage to care and treatment for infectious diseases exacerbated by the opioid crisis, along with prevention and education efforts, will go a long way in helping the country successfully combat increases in infectious disease cases. At the same time, these activities can link people to substance use treatment and reduce injection drug use, thus helping to curb the opioid crisis.

The AIDS Institute strongly endorses the “Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018,” and urges you to support the bill by voting “YES” on the “Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018”. Further, since this bill easily passed the House of Representatives and was included in its opioid package, we urge you to include the bill in the eventual final opioid legislation that the Congress considers. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Carl E. Schmid II
Deputy Executive Director

cc: Members, U.S. Senate