HOUSE PASSES BILL TO COMBAT INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONSEQUENCES OF OPIOID EPIDEMIC

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the “Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018” by voice vote.

“We applaud the House for passing the “Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018,” which will help states and community-based organizations mobilize resources to respond to the alarming spike in new cases of HIV and viral hepatitis associated with injection drug use, which has been heightened by the opioid epidemic,” said Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute.

The bipartisan bill, introduced by Reps. Leonard Lance (R-NJ) and Joseph Kennedy III (D-MA), authorizes $40 million a year over five years for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist state and local governments and others to enhance surveillance systems to track opioid use-related infectious diseases, increase HIV and hepatitis testing and prevention, and improve linkage to HIV and hepatitis treatment and substance use disorder treatment.

According to surveillance data released this year by the CDC, new cases of hepatitis C (HCV) rose 350 percent between 2010 and 2016. HCV deaths now surpass deaths associated with all 60 other notifiable infectious diseases combined. While progress has been made in reducing the number of new HIV infections in the country, including the number of new cases associated with injection drug use, the opioid crisis 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.

“Providing the CDC and its grantees with additional resources for surveillance, testing, prevention, and education efforts will go a long way in helping the country successfully combat
increases in infectious disease cases,” said Frank Hood, Senior Policy Associate at The AIDS Institute. “At the same time, people can be linked to infectious disease and substance use treatment, and reduce injection drug use, thus helping further curb the opioid crisis.”

The bill enjoys bipartisan support in the Senate, where it was introduced by Sens. Todd Young (R-IN), Edward Markey (D-MA), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and was included in the “Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018”, championed by Sens. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Patty Murray (D-WA).

The AIDS Institute urges the Senate to pass this legislation and urges the Congress to include the necessary funding in the FY2019 appropriation bills to ensure the activities authorized in the bill can be carried out.

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The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy research, advocacy and education.

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