Florida Governor Signs Law to Expand State Syringe Service Programs

The AIDS Institute Applauds Governor DeSantis, Law Will Help Address Infectious Disease Complications of the Opioid Epidemic

Tampa, FL - The AIDS Institute commends Florida Governor Ron DeSantis for signing legislation that will help to ease the burden of the opioid crisis in Florida and reduce the risk of HIV and hepatitis C transmission among people who inject drugs. We applaud the bill’s sponsors, Senator Oscar Braynon from Miami Gardens and Reps. Shevrin Jones from West Park and Rene Plasencia from Orlando, for their perseverance in passing this important piece of legislation. We would also like to thank all of our health advocates that worked so hard to provide education on the need for this important legislation.

The Infectious Disease Elimination Act will allow counties to operate mobile clinics that offer the exchange of used needles and hypodermic syringes for clean, unused needles and hypodermic syringes, and will help prevent the transmission of HIV, viral hepatitis, and other blood-borne pathogens among those who inject drugs and their partners. The legislation is an expansion of Miami-Dade County’s successful pilot syringe exchange program.

“Transmission of chronic and complex diseases like HIV and hepatitis C is a troubling complication of the opioid crisis in states across the nation,” commented Michael Ruppal, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “Syringe service programs have been proven to help reduce infectious disease transmission rates. Now that the Governor has signed this legislation, we look forward to beginning programs to advance the fight against these epidemics in many Florida counties and eventually all counties.”
The AIDS Institute is part of Getting to Zero initiatives in both Pinellas and Hillsborough counties that aim to reduce the rate of new HIV transmission to zero. Both counties were identified as places with a high risk for contracting HIV by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, and are being targeted by the Trump Administration’s “Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America” initiative, which has a goal of reducing new HIV infection by 90 percent by 2030. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that approximately one in ten new HIV diagnoses are attributable to injection drug use. “The partners in the Zero initiatives are excited about having this new tool to help reach a population that is often elusive to HIV prevention teams,” continued Ruppal.

The bill signed into law by Gov. DeSantis was approved by the House by a vote of 111 to 3, and by a unanimous vote in the Senate. The law will take effect on July 1, 2019.

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The AIDS Institute is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy, research, advocacy and education. For more information and to become involved, visit www.TheAIDsInstitute.org or write to us at Info@theaidsinstitute.org, and follow The AIDS Institute on Twitter @AIDSAAdvocacy and Facebook at www.facebook.com/The-AIDS-Institute.