California Law to Compel Insurers to Cover Routine HIV Tests Is First in Nation

AB 1894 (Krekorian, D--Burbank), Will Advance Fight Against HIV/AIDS in California Following CDC's Recent Announcement of Alarming 40% Annual Increase in HIV Incidence in the US, Legislation Will Help Communities Meet CDC's Previous 2006 Guidelines Recommending Routine HIV Testing in Clinical and Health Care Settings for All People Ages 13 to 65 AB 1894 Press Teleconference--Tuesday September 2nd 1:00pm

Last update: 7:15 p.m. EDT Aug. 29, 2008

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Aug 29, 2008 (BUSINESS WIRE) -- In an essential next step in the fight against HIV and AIDS, the California Legislature passed legislation by Assembly Member Paul Krekorian (D-Burbank) that will require health insurers operating in California to cover routine HIV screening. Assembly Bill 1894--the first bill of its kind in the nation--passed out of the Assembly after concurrence in Senate amendments (on a bipartisan vote of 47-29) last week, and awaits the Governor's signature to become law.

Assembly Member Krekorian and AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), the bill's sponsor, will join others in a press teleconference on Tuesday September 2nd at 1:00pm (Pacific) to discuss this groundbreaking bill and urge Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to swiftly sign AB 1894.

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WHAT:           Press Teleconference Call--AB 1894, California's
                First-in-the-Nation Bill to Compel Insurers to Cover
Routine
                HIV Tests
WHEN:           Tuesday, September 2, 2008
                1:00 PM (Pacific Time)
WHO:            Hon. Paul Krekorian, California Assembly Member (D--
Burbank)
                Michael Weinstein, AIDS Healthcare Foundation
President
                California Medical Association, speaker TBA
HOW:            dial in information
                +1.877.411.9748
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access code # 7931503

According to the California Office of AIDS, approximately 40,000 persons in California who are infected with HIV are unaware they have the disease. The lack of routine HIV testing results in a lack of treatment to tens of thousands of people who need it, and puts many more people at risk of infection.

After garnering the support of a majority of his colleagues to pass the bill out of the Legislature, Assembly Member Krekorian proudly proclaimed, "This important bill creates an environment in which testing will become routine and more Californians will know their HIV status, get linked to care as needed, and have an overall better quality of life. Studies have shown that when individuals know their HIV status, those found to be positive take steps to decrease the risk of passing their HIV infections on to others. AB 1894 is a straightforward solution to a growing public health dilemma. It helps pave the way to encourage widespread and routine HIV testing throughout California--something the CDC first recommended nationwide nearly two years ago. It is prudent legislation that will save lives."

"AB 1894 provides an ideal opportunity to break the chain of new infections by compelling insurers operating in California to cover the cost of routine HIV testing in medical and health settings like ERs and community clinics," said Michael Weinstein, President of AIDS Healthcare Foundation, which operates the largest community-based HIV testing program in California providing more that 14,000 free tests annually. "As with any disease, the most effective public health strategy to combat HIV/AIDS is to identify those who are infected, provide treatment, and minimize the spread of new infections. AB 1894 will help us identify more people who are already living with HIV, but who may not know their status because they've never been tested. HIV is a treatable--but not curable--infection. With the lifetime cost of care for just one individual living with HIV/AIDS now estimated at more than $600,000, we need to do everything possible to normalize the process for HIV testing in order to identify all those who are infected, link them to treatment and reduce the spread of new infections."

In an alarming announcement just three weeks ago, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) revised its annual estimates of HIV incidence in the U.S. up to 56,000 new HIV cases per year--up from roughly 40,000 cases each year. (The CDC explained this 40 percent increase as a result of better data collection and tracking; however, the original case number has remained static at 40,000 cases annually for the past 10 years--a statistic that already underscored the need for stepped up HIV testing). At the same time, the CDC also reported that only 40 percent of the U.S. population had ever received an HIV test, and that at least a quarter of the estimated one million people in the U.S. living with the virus are unaware of their HIV-positive status.

The CDC had previously issued revised recommendations for its HIV testing guidelines in September 2006. In a departure from its previous guidelines, the CDC recommended that 'opt-out' HIV screening become a part of routine clinical care in all health care settings for every person ages 13 to 65. Unfortunately, this recommendation has not yet been widely implemented on a national scale. One factor may be the issue of who pays for these tests--which can cost as little as $20 per test. By requiring insurers to cover the cost of routine HIV testing, AB 1894 will help move California closer toward implementing the CDC's Revised 2006 HIV Testing Guidelines.

At a time when it is estimated that over 56,000 Americans will be infected this year and nearly 1.1 million people are already living with the virus, AB 1894 keeps California on the forefront of the global fight against the AIDS epidemic.

AB 1894 is sponsored by the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, and is supported by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, the Center for AIDS Research, Education, and Services (CARES), the California Nurses Association, and the California Medical Association.

Assembly Member Paul Krekorian

Assembly Member Paul Krekorian represents the cities of Burbank and Glendale, and the Los Angeles communities of Atwater Village, Los Feliz, North Hollywood, Silver Lake, Toluca Lake, Valley Glen, Valley Village and Van Nuys. He is a board member of the AIDS Community Action Foundation.

AIDS Healthcare Foundation (Sponsor of AB 1894)

AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) is the nation's largest non-profit HIV/AIDS healthcare provider. AHF currently provides medical care and/or services to more than 80,000 individuals in 20 countries worldwide in the US, Africa, Latin America/Caribbean and Asia. Additional information is available at www.aidshealth.org.

SOURCE: AIDS Healthcare Foundation and CA Assembly Member Paul Krekorian's office

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