

## **The Same Fight with No Real Solutions! HIV Services Under Attack**

By Bryan Gooding, Member Illinois Alliance for Sound AIDS Policy.

*Governor Bruce Rauner has proposed the most destructive budget that the HIV community has seen in years. His budget contains a \$1.6 billion cut to Medicaid, a \$6 million slash to HIV funding line representing a 25% cut and a reduction in funding for the African American HIV/AIDS Response Fund by 66% to \$500,000. (From Aids Foundation of Chicago press release)*

Here we are again! It doesn't seem to really matter who is in the hot seat, each year the Governors office releases a Doomsday Budget. And each year they propose to balance the budget by cutting essential services and at the expense of children, seniors, the working poor, the chronically ill, and our most vulnerable populations, instead of addressing the real problem which is revenue. Shamefully our State Legislators, both Republican and Democrats, year after year lack the courage or political will to face up to, or put forth any real long term solutions. The word revenue isn't a popular one, but to continue to kick the can down the road by making cuts to programs that effect health and welfare of the people of Illinois is unacceptable. Whether it's re-instating the tax increase, moving to a progressive tax, increasing revenues from alcohol and tobacco sales, or gambling, getting rid of corporate loopholes and subsidies. The point is there are many solutions, cutting programs that support health and welfare will only cost the state more money in the long run, not only compounding the problem, but resulting in poor health outcomes and a lesser quality of life for all the citizens of Illinois.

Again dramatic cuts to programs and services for people living with or at risk for HIV are on the chopping block. The Governor's office proposes a 6 million dollar or 25% cut in funding for HIV/AIDS. These cuts will mainly be directed at the medication and premium assistance programs (ADAP/CHIC). These programs help people access life saving medications, and assist in paying insurance premiums providing people actually living and working with HIV to have access to insurance under the Affordable Care Act, many, like myself, for the first time. These programs actually save the state money over the long course by keeping people healthy and avoiding the costs of catastrophic care. Outreach and prevention funding is also in danger, cutting off access points to education, testing and treatment to populations most at risk, such as our youth and communities of color, resulting in increased infection rates. Each new HIV infection has the potential of costing the state 250,000 or more over a lifetime of care. If you rely on any of these service or think that they are important, Take Action! Ask your legislators to protect HIV/AIDS funding from these cuts.

One of the biggest casualties of the ill managed current budget and target of proposed cuts is the African American HIV/AIDS Response Act. Under the 2015 budget the program was allocated 1.5 million dollars, the money was never given out and now they want to cut its funding by 66% for FY2016. We effectively got zero for 2015, so 66% of zero is zero. The proposed cuts and the holding back of current funds to a community in crisis beyond unacceptable. The African American community is being disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, accounting for up 67% or more of new infection, while making up only 12% of the population. Because of barriers within the system itself, from racism to stigma, people of color are less likely to have access to or seek testing, treatment, and medications. Take Action!

Ask your Legislators to not only fully fund the African American HIV/AIDS Response Act at 1.5 million for the FY16 budget but release the money promised under the current budget. Black Lives Matter!

Lastly is a proposed 1.6 billion dollars in cuts to Medicaid. Medicaid is the largest insurer of children and the disabled in the State of Illinois. We need to keep this investment in their health. Among other services, recently reinstated dental benefits will disappear, childcare, gone. Medicaid also provides care for thousands of people living with HIV/AIDS. This money is matched dollar for dollar by the federal government under the old Medicaid and fully funded under the expansion; cuts would actually decrease the money coming into our state, and possibly endanger future federal moneys. Healthcare is a human right not a privilege! Take Action! Ask your Legislators to say no to cuts to Medicaid and support the continued full funding and implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

The time to take action is now! Springfield has until June 30 to pass a budget. Through sustained advocacy efforts, making our voice heard, we can effect change and hopefully protect essential services, as we have in the past. Call, write, email or visit your state Reps and Senators. You can multiply your impact by educating your family and friends on the issues and encouraging them to take action also.

Come to Springfield with us! April 15 and May 12, AIDS Foundation of Chicago and IL-Alliance for Sounds AIDS Policy are sponsoring Advocacy Days 2015. Join others living with HIV, service providers, friend, allies, and Advocates as we take the issues directly to Springfield. Participants take part in training on the issues, and are given help in connecting them to their own stories, then they meet with their legislators and ask them for their support. Open Door Clinic will be organizing a group of clients to go down state on May 15. You can go on either date. Just be sure to reach out in any way you can and make your voice heard. For more information on Advocacy Days or the issues you can contact:

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Register for Advocacy Days at [aidschicago.org/advocacydays](http://aidschicago.org/advocacydays)