



May 11, 2009

Dear Legislator:

On behalf of the HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York, I write to enlist your support for a bill to remove the ban on federal funding for syringe exchange. Sponsored by Representative Jose Serrano (D-NY), the bill (HR 179) has 88 co-sponsors and was referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee on January 6, 2009.

The HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York is comprised of physicians, service providers, representatives of City government agencies, advocates, and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and makes decisions about the allocation and distribution of approximately \$110 million in funding for medical and support services for PLWHA in the New York Eligible Metropolitan Area (EMA).

Planning Council members have witnessed the impact of syringe exchange on reducing the number of new HIV infections in users of injection drugs. More than 20,000 IDUs are living with diagnosed HIV/AIDS in the EMA.¹ Following the implementation of targeted HIV prevention measures for injection drug users, the rate of new HIV infections among IDUs declined almost 80% from 1990 to 2002. During this time period in New York City, the number of needles exchanged grew from 250,000 to 3,000,000 while HIV incidence as measured in person-years at risk consistently dropped.² Syringe exchange does not increase the number of injection drug users³ but, rather, uses harm reduction principles to mitigate the health impact of the behavior. In addition, syringe exchange helps some drug users enter into structured substance use treatment and access primary care.

Currently, New York City cannot use federal funding to purchase syringes for the syringe exchange programs, although federal funding can be used for other components of these programs. With federal funding, the New York EMA could

¹ Bennani et al., DOHMH special study, 2007, http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/dires/epi_prison%20survey%202008.pdf

² Des Jarlais et al., *Am J Pub Health* 2005;95;1439-1444.

³ Fisher et al., *JAIDS* 2003;33;199-205.

increase the number of syringe exchange programs and enable more drug users to obtain access to this key preventive strategy.

My colleagues on the Planning Council and I commend Representative Serrano for his courage and foresightedness in introducing HR 179 and request that you support this bill with its critical impact on public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Soraya Elcock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Soraya Elcock
Community Co-Chair