



Southern AIDS Coalition

CONTACT:

Patrick Packer
Southern AIDS Coalition,
Executive Director
ppacker@southernaidscoalition.org

For Immediate Release

Southern AIDS Coalition Supports Ryan White Reauthorization and Community Consensus Document

New Leadership Enables Organization to Fight HIV Disease in the Area of the Country Most Impacted by the Epidemic

[Birmingham, AL], September 22, 2009 – The **Southern AIDS Coalition (SAC)** continues its support for the immediate reauthorization of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Modernization Act of 2006 as described in a carefully crafted document supported by more than 300 organizations across the United States. SAC and many other groups believe in the core principle that federal funding for HIV treatment, care, services, education, and housing should follow the epidemic, allowing the services to reach the low-income persons living with HIV disease in order to maximize their health outcomes and to reduce the rates of new infections. While the Ryan White legislation is exceedingly complicated, compromises were reached on many fronts to enable the HIV community to come together in support of the continuation of this critical bill that provides a safety net of lifesaving treatment, care, and services to low-income persons without adequate health insurance. This legislation, slated to sunset on September 30, 2009, is particularly necessary in southern states that face extraordinary rates of poverty, limited access to health care, and the highest HIV rates in the country.

Although the community consensus document has been presented to Congress and is supported almost unanimously across the country, other bills that would support particular cities, such as House Bill 3293, have been presented and even passed in the House as a viable means of reauthorizing Ryan White. This bill, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office released in August 2009, *Ryan White CARE Act: Estimated Effect of Proposed Stop-Loss Provision in H.R. 3293 on Urban Areas*, would initiate a “stop loss provision” that would take money from every metropolitan area in the country to provide additional funding to San Francisco and New York City. SAC believes that these sorts of manipulations of the legislation are unfair to the people living in the areas that have the numbers to justify the funding and undermine the community process

that resulted in the community consensus document to reauthorize Ryan White without major changes that could cause another lengthy and contentious reauthorization process.

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlight the need for a targeted response in the southern United States.

- More persons living with AIDS reside in the South than in any other area of the country.
- The South has approximately 37% of the nation's population but reports 40% of AIDS prevalence and 46% of AIDS incidence.
- In 2007 there were 26,347 newly diagnosed cases of HIV infection (not AIDS) in the United States.
- Of the 26,347 new HIV cases, 51.2% were diagnosed in the 17 southern states.
- Of the 34 states with confidential, names-based reporting, seven of the ten top states for AIDS case rates were in the South.
- Of the top twenty metropolitan areas with the highest AIDS case rates, 14 were in the South.
- From 2003 to 2007 death rates dropped in every region of the country, but the decrease in the South of 8.5% lags far behind the other areas (other decreases – West: 17.1%, Midwest: 19.5%, and Northeast: 30.6%).
- More than half (52%) of African Americans living with AIDS and 58% of new AIDS cases reside in the South, although the African-American population in the South is approximately 20%..
- According to the 2008 report from the United Health Foundation, *America's Health Rankings*, nine of the ten states with the worst health rankings are in the South.
- In some areas of the rural South, women make up 30 to 50% of the HIV-positive population, and most of these women are black.
- A recent report by the Latino AIDS Commission, *Shaping the New Response: HIV/AIDS & Latinos in the Deep South*, finds that "...HIV infection and AIDS cases are rising at an alarming rate among Latino populations while prevention education lags behind."
- The June 27, 2008, edition of *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* reported that the number of HIV/AIDS diagnoses among men who have sex with men increased 8.6% from 2001 to 2006 to an estimated 97,577 cases; 55% or 53,710 of these cases were in the South.

"One of President Obama's stated goals in the fight against HIV and AIDS is to reduce the disparities in care that currently exist in the United States," says Patrick Packer, Executive Director of the Southern AIDS Coalition. Lack of access to quality health care cannot be resolved without prioritizing the huge disparities in the South. While Health Care Reform in the larger context will hopefully eliminate some of these gaping disparities, we cannot forget the people living with HIV disease as the debate moves forward. The Ryan White Program has proven to be an effective model in serving the most vulnerable populations of persons living with HIV disease. The program must continue, as the health of hundreds of thousands of people depends on the services provided." says Packer.

About the Southern AIDS Coalition

Recent projects include the release of the *Southern States Manifesto: Update 2008* and the launch of the Southern AIDS Living Quilt (www.livingquilt.org). For more information about the **Southern AIDS Coalition** contact **Patrick Packer** at ppacker@southernaidscoalition.org or visit www.southernaidscoalition.org.

###