



March 30, 2006

Good morning. My name is Lorraine Teel and I am the Executive Director of the Minnesota AIDS Project. Since it's beginnings in 1983, the MN AIDS Project has been at the ready to respond to the needs of Minnesotans both at risk of HIV infection and those already living with this terrible disease. We have responded with clear and honest information regarding risk, up-to-the-minute referrals for those desperately wanting to know their status and with services that connect and keep individuals in medical care if they are indeed HIV-positive. And the MAP AIDSLine has been at the center of those services. Today public health officials at the State are abandoning their responsibilities to protect our public health. In one fell swoop they have eliminated funding for that lifeline service, that virtual 911 for AIDS available to all Minnesotans. They are recklessly cutting HIV prevention grants while at the same time not even spending all the dollars they have been awarded to keep these programs going.

On April 17th this year not only will all of our taxes come due, but the Health Department will also issue their annual report on new cases of HIV reported last year. And it will come as no surprise that there are more Minnesotans living with HIV in this State than ever before. Now, more than ever before is not the time to cut HIV prevention – it's the time to increase that funding. Why are we here, now three years in a row, demanding more support for HIV prevention funding for the fastest growing community of those impacted by this disease – African born Minnesotans? Why are we here demanding re-instatement of the MAP AIDSLine? And why are we here demanding that the Health Department spend every dollar on the table they have for HIV prevention? We're here because of an absent of leadership at the top.

All of the communities affected by HIV in Minnesota have stepped forward to concentrate on ending this epidemic in Minnesota. We have established prevention programs in the African American community, the gay men's community, in the African born community and work to reach women of color throughout the state. In the meantime, each of these programs is struggling to first keep the funding level with what they've received in the past while at the same time being asked to do more. Now we've learned late last Friday that the Health Department plans on cutting these grants while their office sits back and watches the carefully crafted HIV prevention in the system suffer. We are here today to not only ask the legislature to support efforts to keep these programs stable and able to continue making a difference – we are here demanding that our public health officials do the same.

We know that HIV prevention works. Plain and simple. We have not seen alarming increases in HIV infections in this state despite more people living with this communicable disease. Why? Because we have focused on prevention and will continue to do so. But the state has a role in that work and we are here to hold the state accountable. If we let up now, we will only pay more later – and we will pay a heavy cost. In human lives and medical expenses. Let's put our dollars where they do make a difference – in HIV prevention.