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September 24, 2009

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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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Annandale, VA

Dear Chairmen Harkin and Obey & Ranking Members Cochran and Tiahrt:

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The HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDS SA) are writing in support of a full repeal of the ban on federal funding for needle exchange programs in the final FY2010 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill.

HIVMA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Arlene D. Bardeguez, MD, MPH
UMDNJ - New Jersey Medical School
Newark, NJ

The House-passed version of the FY 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services and education appropriations bill (H.R. 3293) discontinued the ban on federal funding, but included an amendment that prohibits federal funding to needle exchange programs that operate within 1,000 feet of schools, colleges, universities, playgrounds, video arcades, youth centers or events sponsored by such entities.

CHAIR-ELECT

Michael S. Saag, MD, FIDSA
University of Alabama at Birmingham
Birmingham, AL

The 1,000-foot restriction, if it stands, would effectively maintain the ban by severely impeding efforts to implement such programs, especially in cities and urban areas where, in many cases, the need is the greatest. The version of the bill that passed the Senate Appropriations Committee maintained the ban on the use of Federal funds for needle exchange programs.

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Daniel R. Kuritzkes, MD, FIDSA
Brigham and Women's Hospital
Cambridge, MA

We appeal to you to do all that you can to work towards a full repeal of the ban in conference committee, including removal or easing of unworkable zoning restriction language.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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IDSA represents more than 8,600 infectious diseases physicians and scientists devoted to patient care, education, research, prevention, and public health. Housed within IDSA is the HIVMA, whose 3,600 members conduct research, administer prevention programs, and provide clinical services to individuals with HIV/AIDS. As infectious disease experts, we are deeply committed to evidence-based public health intervention that decreases transmission of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Based on numerous studies and extensive research evidence, the science is clear: needle exchange programs are cost-effective, lifesaving, and do not promote drug use. They also connect hard-to-reach populations to primary health care and to addiction treatment. **Lifting the ban on federal funding to support such programs will prevent new HIV, HBV and HCV infections that burden a significant proportion of minority and underserved communities and save lives – but only if the services are available to the people who need them.**

In jurisdictions that already have needle exchange programs, local ordinances have determined how these programs should best be managed and where they should be located. The federal government should not override local authority to make such decisions in the best interests of their communities and within the context of locally-determined priorities for broader HIV prevention efforts.

Full repeal of the needle exchange funding ban would follow the science and represent a tremendous public health victory. We are eager to work with you to achieve this goal in the FY2010 appropriations process. With an estimated 55,000 new HIV infections occurring every year – one new infection every 9.5 minutes – it is imperative that we support and invest in the full arsenal of evidence-based measures to prevent new HIV infections before they occur, including syringe exchange programs.

Again, thank you for your leadership on this issue and your support for a strong national commitment to evidence-based HIV/AIDS prevention. Please call on us if we can be of assistance. We can be reached through staff contacts Andrea Weddle, HIVMA (703) 299-0915 or Robert Guidos, IDSA (703) 299-0202.

Sincerely,

Arlene Bardeguet, MD, MPH
Chair, HIV Medicine Association Board of Directors

Anne A. Gershon, MD, FIDSA
President, Infectious Diseases Society of America