

WASHINGTON—Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL) released a letter he and other members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation sent to President Barack Obama, urging him to protect federal funding for syringe exchange programs that are vital in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

“After 20 years of federal law prohibiting the use of federal funds for syringe exchange programs, Congress enacted legislation last year to end the ban and move the nation forward with science-based approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention,” they wrote in the letter. **“Now, a year later, your leadership is essential to ensuring that the country continues to move forward in reducing new HIV infections among its citizens.”**

The letter asks the President to remain committed to local jurisdiction over syringe exchanges. Syringe exchange programs in Chicago and Illinois have helped reduce HIV infections stemming from shared needles by 67 percent in the last 10 years. The letter additionally asks for support of legislation Congress enacted last year to end the prohibition of using federal funds for syringe exchange programs.

Following the letter’s delivery, the continuing resolution to fund the federal government for the remainder of FY2011 dropped the ban on funding for syringe exchange programs that was included in the House-passed budget.

The text of the letter is pasted below.

April 8, 2011

The Honorable President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

As members of the Illinois Delegation to the 112th Congress, we are writing to request that you continue to protect federal funding for proven-effective syringe exchange programs.

For nearly 20 years, the City of Chicago has invested in the low-cost and lifesaving programs that keep injection drug users, their partners and communities healthy. The state of Illinois also recently started funding syringe exchange programs. Syringe exchange programs consistently demonstrate their ability to reduce HIV and hepatitis transmission, and connect people to food and housing assistance, medical care and, when program participants are ready, to substance use treatment.

We are incredibly proud of our State's contribution to reducing injection-drug-related HIV infections. Our investment and support for syringe exchange programs has played an essential role in Illinois achieving the 67 percent decline in injection-drug-related HIV infections over the last ten years. We are committed to sustaining this decline, but we cannot do it alone.

After 20 years of federal law prohibiting the use of federal funds for syringe exchange programs, Congress enacted legislation last year to end the ban and move the nation forward with science-based approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention. Now, a year later, your leadership is essential to ensuring that the country continues to move forward in reducing new HIV infections among its citizens. Reinstating the ban or any similar restriction would be tantamount to retreating in the fight against HIV/AIDS. With nearly 1.2 million people in the nation living with HIV/AIDS and 56,000 people becoming infected each year, we cannot afford and should not allow any such retreat.

We are thankful for the commitment that you have demonstrated to this legitimate HIV prevention intervention throughout your political career. While in the Illinois Senate, you supported passage of the non-prescription purchase and possession law. As a presidential candidate, you pledged to end the federal funding ban on syringe exchange funding. As President, you signed the elimination of the federal funding ban into law and released the National HIV/AIDS Strategy that includes syringe exchange as an essential intervention to preventing new HIV infections.

As negotiations on federal appropriations continue, we urge you to continue to act in accordance with the National HIV/AIDS Strategy and in the best interest of those living with and

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at risk of HIV/AIDS. Do not permit any compromise on syringe exchange. Please defend the current law that allows local jurisdictions to maintain decision-making control over syringe exchange. We look forward to opportunities to leverage federal funds to sustain and expand these lifesaving interventions.

Sincerely,

Congressman Mike Quigley Congressman Danny K. Davis Congresswoman Jan
Schakowsky Congressman Luis
V. Gutierrez Cong
ressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.