



Massachusetts Hepatitis C Coalition
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MASSACHUSETTS

March 10, 2006

Chairman Robert DeLeo
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony for FY07 Funding for Hepatitis C in line item 4513-1114

Dear Chairman DeLeo:

On behalf of the Hepatitis C Coalition and the Massachusetts Public Health Association, I ask you to support an increase in funding for hepatitis C services (line item 4513-1114) in the FY07 budget to the level of \$2,505,000.

Hepatitis C is a communicable, blood-borne, viral illness that causes inflammation of the liver. Without treatment, the virus can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and death. The liver is the largest organ in the body and is responsible for over 500 bodily functions such as digestion, metabolism, blood clotting, processing vitamins and minerals, regulating energy, building amino acids in order to build muscles and detoxification. You can imagine how a sick liver could lead to the deterioration of a person's body.

The hepatitis C virus is highly prevalent in the Commonwealth. In 2004 alone, according to the Department of Public Health, 10,127 people were newly diagnosed with this disease. It is estimated that over 100,000 people in Massachusetts have hepatitis C. But the Centers for Disease Control report that only around 5% of infected individuals even know they have the disease. Because of inadequate testing of the disease in the State, we know that these numbers are underestimates. This also means that people are unknowingly spreading the disease to others.

The current level of services for those infected with hepatitis C does not come near to the level of need. Since FY02, funding for hepatitis C services in Massachusetts have been cut by 80%. With an increase in funding for services within the DPH, the following programs can be expanded upon or reinstated:

- Counseling and testing services at community health centers.
- State Laboratory services that test for the presence, type and stage of the disease in a person.
- Educational programs for health care and social service providers and the general public.
- Case management services for infected people.
- Surveillance of hepatitis C to assess State needs.

With your help, Massachusetts can begin to effectively diagnose, manage and prevent transmission of the hepatitis C virus. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Jenny Nathans
Massachusetts Hepatitis C Coalition

The Massachusetts Hepatitis C Coalition works to increase awareness of hepatitis C through education, advocacy and coalition building. Members include over 100 organizations representing people living with hepatitis C, veterans, the homeless, HIV/AIDS service providers, substance abuse treatment providers, local health boards, community health centers, health care providers and many others. The Coalition is coordinated by the Massachusetts Public Health Association.