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Health Officer

May 24, 2017

Dear County Executive Schuh:

The Anne Arundel County Commission on HIV/AIDS strongly supports an Opioid-Associated Disease and Prevention Outreach program in Anne Arundel County as outlined in the Governor's Heroin and Opioid Emergency Task Force recommendations.

On May 10, 2016, Senate Bill 97 was signed into law authorizing the establishment of Syringe Services Programs throughout the State of Maryland, previously permitted only in Baltimore City and Prince George's County. This bill provides the opportunity to establish a program within Anne Arundel County, which was previously prohibited by State law.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) remain serious concerns for Anne Arundel County residents. Maryland ranked fifth in the United States for HIV diagnoses rates in 2015 and third in AIDS diagnosis rates. In that year, 4.4% of HIV cases diagnosed in Maryland were in Anne Arundel County, ranking us fifth among Maryland jurisdictions for percent of total newly diagnosed HIV cases. As of June 2016, there were a reported 1,175 adults/adolescents living with HIV/AIDS in Anne Arundel County, 62 of whom were newly diagnosed with HIV. Of those living with HIV/AIDS, 19.4% have a known exposure category of intravenous drug use. Unfortunately, 16.3% of infected residents are unaware that they are HIV-positive.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2015 nationwide data reveals that 1 in 10 HIV diagnoses are among people who inject drugs. More than half of the people who inject drugs (PWID) used a syringe service in 2015 and only 1 in 4 PWID got all of their syringes from sterile sources. The CDC also reports that heroin use has increased by 60% (114% in whites) in recent years. The heroin and prescription opioid epidemics could lead to new HIV outbreaks such as the historic one that occurred in Scott County, Indiana.

In 2015, rural Scott County, Indiana (population 4,200) with an average annual HIV diagnosis rate of five diagnoses per year saw an influx of new cases after HIV was introduced into a network of intravenous drug users. The introduction of the HIV virus into this network, from a single index case, resulted in 190 new diagnoses of HIV. With the increase in heroin use within Anne Arundel County, we could experience a similar outbreak.

Baltimore City has run an extremely successful Syringe Exchange Program since 1994. Not only does this program provide sterile syringe distribution, it also provides education on both overdose prevention and response as well as substance abuse treatment referrals.

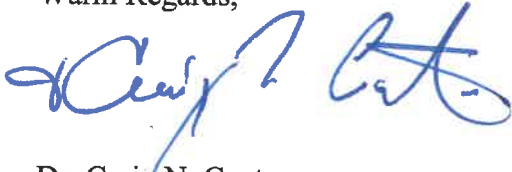
Since its inception in 1994, the Baltimore City Syringe Exchange Program has successfully **reduced HIV/AIDS transmission in intravenous drug users from 60.4% to less than 8%.** In FY16 Baltimore City had 3,091 clients enrolled in their program. Importantly, **of the 3,091 clients enrolled, 298 (9.6%) are Anne Arundel County residents.** Syringe Service Programs establish trust between users and public health, making it easier for users to seek help when they are ready. Syringe Service Programs reduce the costs and harms related to using.

The CDC recommends that “States should ensure people who inject drugs have access to integrated prevention services from a reliable source, including sterile injection equipment, opioid therapy, and HIV and hepatitis testing”. Moreover, “syringe services programs can be a valuable component of a comprehensive prevention strategy for people who inject drugs and their partners”. Syringe exchange programs will allow us to get to another layer of the population that we have little access to and are an integral part of the solution to combat the opioid epidemic within the County.

The Anne Arundel County Commission on HIV/AIDS respectfully requests your consideration for implementing such a program within Anne Arundel County. A syringe exchange program will move us towards our goal of zero: **Zero New Infections, Zero Discrimination, and Zero AIDS-related Deaths.**

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 410-360-4207, or email cncoates@msn.com.

Warm Regards,



Dr. Craig N. Coates
Pastor, Fresh Start Church, Inc.
Chair, Anne Arundel County Commission on HIV/AIDS