

California may adopt HIV database

By Charlene Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - In an effort to protect untold millions of dollars in federal HIV and AIDS funding, the California State Senate has passed a bill on that would allow name tracking of its HIV patients.

Some HIV/AIDS activists who issued concerns with name tracking databases — such as privacy breaches, issues of integrity and disenfranchisement — insist that despite those risks, it is vital that the resources and services provided to HIV/AIDS patients through federal funding be maintained.

"We can't afford to lose any HIV/AIDS funding. More people than ever are currently living with HIV/AIDS, and there are also more people with HIV/AIDS who don't have private healthcare coverage and who may not be eligible for Medi-Cal," stated Senator Sheila Kuehl in a Jan. 19 Senate press release. She is the co-author of Senate Bill 699 (SB699).

Phill Wilson, CEO of the Black AIDS Institute, asserted that a loss of funding means that people living with HIV and AIDS risk not having access to necessary treatment.

"We risk further erosion on prevention efforts in California, where we currently have a governor who has not demonstrated a desire of protecting the health safety nets," he argued.

"The combination of a governor who is not interested in the health safety net and a president who is not interested in a health safety net means all of us are in peril."

The Los Angeles-based AIDS activist shared that, in theory, he is uncomfortable with names reporting for numerous reasons, such as recent Internet security breaches and release of confidential information; the political climate of the government eavesdropping and invading the privacy of its citizens; the ongoing mass incarceration of Black men and a complete willingness to apply justice unequally; an

environment that criminalizes HIV; and the potential of marginalizing Black people.

According to the Senate press release, California received more than \$223 million in CARE funds in 2005, but risks losing that money and more by late 2006. The document continued that SB699, co-authored by Senator Nell Soto, D-Pomona, stems from a condition of the Ryan White CARE Act Reauthorization of 2000, which mandates the distribution of Ryan White Care Act funds on the basis of HIV cases—not AIDS cases alone—because HIV cases offer a more accurate picture of the epidemic.

The press release referenced an Aug. 16, 2004, letter to members of Congress, wherein Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control, stated that, "Rapid implementation of a scientifically accurate and equitable system of national HIV reporting can only occur with the adoption of a standard system of patient identification

that will be used by all states," and that "the most validated and easily implemented of these identifiers is the name of the person diagnosed with HIV infection."

Damon Dozier, congressional liaison for the National Minority AIDS Council, noted that name tracking proponents hail the system because it includes transferability and portability mechanisms to ensure patients' access to drugs, medication, treatment and funding.

However, opponents and privacy advocates are concerned, he said, because name tracking has not been tested for security aspects and may lead to stigmatism.

"Recently in Florida, the State Health Department had an instance where a contractor or employee mistakenly published the names of its HIV register on the state register. The integrity of state bases can be compromised," he said. "When you tie the dollars into the equation," he added, "then it becomes an issue that's more pressing."

Charlene Muhammad writes for the Final Call.



Malcom X's daughter Malaak Shabazz speaks during the funeral ceremony for Coretta Scott King at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga., on Tuesday.

Coretta

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model? Then model her behavior."

Sen. Clinton said, "She has passed, but we must take up her burden. We'll have to split it up, because it was a heavy burden to bear. But together, we can carry it. We can carry on the struggle against racism and discrimination."

Among others who spoke were Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., and Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Mich.

Mourners began lining up before 3:00 a.m. to pay their last respects to Coretta Scott King as her casket lay in a chapel at the huge, 25,000-member church.

Thousands of others had filed by her casket as she lay in honor at the Georgia Capitol over the weekend — the first woman and the first African-American accorded such an honor there — and at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta on Monday. The Ebenezer church was where her husband was baptized, where he preached alongside his father in the 1960s and where his funeral was held after he was assassinated.

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