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CBC Members Applaud Rollout of National AIDS Strategy

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Washington D.C. – Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Barbara Lee and members of the CBC applauded today’s release by the Obama Administration of the first-ever National AIDS Strategy, which aims to reduce the annual number of new HIV infections by 25 percent within five years.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus have long advocated for increased attention and resources to address HIV/AIDS in the United States, including helping to spearhead the launch of the Minority AIDS Initiative in 1998 under the leadership of Rep. Maxine Waters. For the past year and a half, CBC members have also worked closely with the Obama Administration to craft a strategy to better coordinate and guide the national response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic - with a focus on areas with the greatest need and population groups at greatest risk.

“I applaud the President for developing this new National AIDS Strategy and laying out a roadmap for how our country must address this devastating disease. Even as we welcome the release of this strategy, we must also recognize the urgent need for additional funding to eliminate the current waiting lists for life-saving AIDS drugs in states around the country,” said Congresswoman Lee. “Our charge in Congress must now be to ensure that we provide the necessary resources to address these urgent needs and ensure that this new strategy gets implemented quickly and effectively. The Congressional Black Caucus and our members look forward to working with the President and his

Administration, as well as our state and local governments, to expand and improve access to prevention, care and treatment services and address the needs of our communities.”

As the administration plan took shape, CBC members across the country participated in joint town hall meetings with the Administration and stressed the importance of:

- Reducing racial and ethnic health disparities associated with HIV/AIDS;
- Targeting resources to meet the needs of high risk groups - particularly Black men who have sex with men, Black women, and intravenous drug users;
- Stopping the spread of HIV in prisons;
- Supporting culturally competent HIV/AIDS training and diversity programs among clinicians, and;
- Ensuring that testing programs are linked to care and treatment services at the state and local level.

“This announcement by the White House is extremely heartening to me as co-Chair of the HIV/AIDS taskforce in the Congressional Black Caucus and representing a district that has one of the highest HIV/AIDS rates in the country that is, unfortunately, increasing,” said Congressman Gregory Meeks (D-NY). “A nationally coordinated strategy to expand urgent care to those who already suffer from this disease and educate others by increasing testing and preventive methods to stop the spread of this epidemic is critical.”

Congresswoman Donna Christensen, co-chair of the CBC’s Health and Wellness Taskforce, said it is essential not only to ensure that the Strategy is adequately and consistently funded, but also that the plan target communities with the greatest need.

“While we are concerned and will be closely monitoring how robustly the various aspects of this Strategy will be funded, I am pleased to know that this National AIDS Strategy will put emphasis on reaching and positively affecting the very individuals who are most at-risk for HIV infection and whose current HI/AIDS-related needs are woefully under-addressed,” said Congresswoman Christensen. “I look forward to working with the Office of National AIDS Policy, as well as with the other agencies who have been designated to play a leading role in implementing this Strategy, to help take this nation one giant step forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS.”

Congresswoman Maxine Waters, co-Chair of the CBC’s HIV/AIDS taskforce, said “I am pleased that the President has responded to the national HIV/AIDS community’s call for a national strategy to deal with this growing epidemic in our country.

“My legislation, the Stop AIDS in Prison Act (H.R. 1429), passed the House last year and currently awaits consideration in the Senate. I am hopeful that the President’s strategy, which in part seeks to address the effects of HIV/AIDS within the prison population, will encourage the Senate to pass this legislation without delay.

“I am well aware that many national and community groups and organizations had a hand in shaping this policy, and I am grateful to them for their hard work. I trust they will continue to stress the need

for sustained and increased federal funding for this strategy. I look forward to reviewing the full details of the plan.”