



House Committee on Public Health
Testimony by John Carlo, MD, MS
Texas Medical Association & Prism Health North Texas
House Bill 2235 by Rep. Venton Jones
April 3, 2023

Honorable Chair Klick, and esteemed committee members, it is a true pleasure to be with you today.

My name is Dr. John Carlo, and I am a public health physician from Dallas, a member of the Texas Medical Association's Board of Trustees, and the CEO of Prism Health North Texas, the largest community health center in North Texas, providing HIV prevention and treatment since 1986. I am honored to testify today on behalf of myself and both organizations in support of House Bill 2235. I extend my personal thanks to Representative Jones for his sponsorship of this bill.

Since the outbreak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, we've made remarkable progress in the United States and in our own communities of Texas, so much so that one might think HIV is no longer a problem. But HIV is still a public health threat, and we still have a great deal of work to do. New infection rates have not changed in Texas over the past five years. Nearly 100,000 Texans are living with a diagnosed HIVⁱ infection. However, since an estimated 13% of those living with HIV are unaware and not yet diagnosed, we know the total number of people in Texas living with HIV is much higherⁱⁱ. More than 40% of all new HIV transmissions in the U.S. occur from people who do not know they are living with HIVⁱⁱⁱ. Fortunately, the medication we can provide patients once they are diagnosed is highly effective in preventing HIV transmission. Most people reach an untransmissible level of virus in their bodies^{iv}.

This bill will reduce the number of people living with HIV who don't know their status, connect them with the care and medication they need, and reduce the likelihood of transmission.

This bill does not replace current risk-based HIV testing efforts by public and private public health organizations, but addresses people these efforts would miss. Nearly half of all newly diagnosed individuals visited one or more health care service in the year leading up to being diagnosed^v. Many had more than six health care encounters^{vi}.

Anytime someone is getting a blood test for other routine tests like cholesterol, heart disease, or diabetes, their health care professional, – with patient consent – can also submit an HIV test. Current CDC guidance supports HIV testing at least once for everyone aged 15-65, regardless of risk factors, and is already included in routine pregnancy screening and on all blood donations. If someone has been tested once – including for the process of blood donation – and is not at risk, they do not need to be tested again. Almost 40% of U.S. adults have already been tested^{vii}.

Finally, the bill permits the patient to opt out of testing, and the health care professional is not required to test. But since HIV tests can cost as little as \$7, and all insurance plans cover them, this is a simple, yet impactful measure to not only improve the health of the individual but to prevent HIV spread in our communities.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I am happy to answer any questions.

ⁱ Texas Department of State Health Services. HIV/STD Program. Epi Profile Section 2 Texans Living with HIV in 2018. <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/hiv-std-program/hiv-dashboard/texas-dshs-hiv-std/epi-profile-section-2>. Accessed 3.31.2023.

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Estimated HIV Incidence and Prevalence in the United States, 2015-19. HIV Surveillance Supplemental Report, 2021; 26(1). www.cdc.gov. Accessed 3/31/2023.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gopalappa C, Farnham PG, Chen YH, Sansom SL. Progression and transmission of HIV/AIDS (PATH 2.0). *Med Decis Making*. 2017;37(2):224-233.

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV Treatment. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithhiv/treatment.html>. Accessed 3/31/2023.

^v Wejnert C, Prejean J, Hoots B, et al. Prevalence of Missed Opportunities for HIV Testing among Persons Unaware of Their Infection. *JAMA*. 2018; 319(24): 2555-7.

^{vi} Downing A, Garcia-Diaz JB. Missed Opportunities for HIV Diagnosis. *JIAPAC*. 2017; 16(1): 14-7.

^{vii} CDC Press Release: Most Americans Have Never Had and HIV Test, New Data Show. June 27, 2019. www.cdc.gov. Accessed 3/31/2023.