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February 1, 2012

Dear Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson and members of the Health Care, Human Services and Rural Health Policy Committee

My name is Michael Kaplan and I serve as Executive Director of Cascade AIDS Project. I am submitting this written testimony in strong support of SB 1507.

Cascade AIDS Project (CAP) is the largest and oldest AIDS Service Organization throughout the state of Oregon. For over 25 years, we have been dedicated to preventing HIV infections, supporting and empowering those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and eliminating HIV/AIDS-related stigma. Last year CAP provided support services for over 1,600 people living with HIV, provided HIV counseling and testing for more than 3,000 individuals, and conducted education to thousands more.

CAP is strongly in favor of SB 1507 (HIV Consent). We believe this legislation is critical to finally bringing an end to the HIV epidemic in Oregon.

In May of 2011, research supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) showed that access to early treatment could reduce likelihood of an HIV-positive person infecting their sexual partners by 96%. This means that if we got everyone in the US to know their status tomorrow and on to early treatment -we would go from over 40k new infections transmitted sexually each year in the US for the past ten years to less than a few thousand.

Towards this end and knowing the importance of treatment for both individuals infected and for the health of the public overall, CDC currently recommends that all sexually active individuals between the ages of 13 and 64 be screened annually for HIV.

Without the changes proposed via SB 1507, our current legislative requirements around HIV-testing are burdensome and slow the uptake of testing. In fact, the state of Oregon lags behind the national average in early case identification. While many states have already moved towards implementing CDC's routine testing recommendations, our outdated laws related to HIV-screening serve as a barrier to Oregon doing the same.

From a personal perspective, I have lived with HIV for 20 years, and I can say for the first time I see a way to break this epidemic, but it will never happen if we continue outdated legislation that creates added barriers to testing.

While Cascade AIDS Project believes no one should be tested for HIV without their knowledge, we do believe a verbal discussion AND/OR inclusion of information within a general medical consent form should be more than sufficient.

(cont.)

Today, HIV-related stigma has been greatly reduced, but not eliminated and is a concern for CAP and so many infected and affected by this epidemic. However, at the same time, we believe our outdated legislation that proposes going through a written separate consent for HIV testing actually increases stigma related to HIV and that there are far better ways to address the concerns of stigma and discrimination.

The proposed SB 1507 has been discussed with CAP's Board of Directors, a diverse group of 18 individuals that includes several living with HIV-today. CAP and our Board are fully in support of SB 1507.

While I am unable to be at the hearings today, I am available for question at any time and reachable either via e-mail at mkaplan@cascadeaids.org or on my direct line at 503.278.3810.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Kaplan", written in a cursive style.

Michael Kaplan
Executive Director
Cascade AIDS Project
Dir. 503.278.3810