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**For immediate release:**

## **Buffalo community leaders galvanize to highlight AIDS' impact**

**Buffalo** – To mark World AIDS Day (Dec. 1), the Black Leadership Commission on AIDS of Buffalo, in conjunction with the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network and Safe Haven Ministries, will present “Prayers for Healing.” The event will be from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Evergreen Conference Center, Delaware Court Building, 199 Chippewa Street.

For more information about the event, call Donna Chapman, at (716) 884-5433 or (716) 572-5645.

The Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (BLCA) of Buffalo is an affiliate of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, which has led nationwide efforts to focus attention on HIV/AIDS. Last year, after a two-day conclave of leaders from around the country, the NBLCA proposed the **National HIV/AIDS Elimination Act**, which was developed for formal introduction to the 2009 Congress. Among other measures, the Act calls for the President and Congress to declare the HIV/AIDS crisis in the African-American community a “**public health emergency**” and to formulate a domestic plan of action to allocate resources to address the emergency in the United States.

Data released on HIV in the past few months by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that AIDS' impact is even worse than most imagined. C. Virginia Fields, President and CEO of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (NBLCA), said, “The stunning new data underscore, in the most dramatic terms possible, the inexorable movement of the HIV/AIDS epidemic into black and other minority communities and the failure of government at all levels to respond to that change,” Fields said. “It is nothing short of outrageous that three decades into this epidemic so little has been done to effectively target educational, health care and prevention resources to a community suffering such a disproportionate share of the pain.”

It is crucially important to address the heavy toll HIV/AIDS is taking on African-Americans who, in many cases, already are disproportionately impacted by economic and social ills, said Rev. Dr. James A. Lewis III, Chairman of BLCA of Buffalo.

“We’re issuing a clarion call to the community to be part of the event on Dec. 1,” Rev. Lewis said. “The statistics on AIDS in Western New York are just staggering. We need to come together as a community and pray for those with this virus.”

Local statistics show that:

- Although African Americans make up approximately two fifths (36.6 percent) of Buffalo's population, they make up more than half (53.9 percent) of the people with AIDS in Buffalo. Whites represent nearly a third (32.1 percent) of the people with AIDS in Buffalo.
- African-American men make up the majority of men with AIDS in Buffalo (51.1 percent). White men make up approximately 37 percent of the men with AIDS, while Hispanic men make up about 10 percent of the men with AIDS in Buffalo.
- African-American women make up more than half (53 percent) of the women with AIDS in Buffalo. White women make up less than a fifth (14.2 percent) of women with AIDS in Buffalo.
- There are only thirteen children under the age of 13 with AIDS in Buffalo. Of these children, nine (69.2 percent) are African-American. Hispanic children (23.1 percent) and White children (7.7 percent) represent the remaining children under the age of 13 with AIDS in Buffalo.
- In Buffalo, the majority (57%) of the women of child-bearing age (between 13 and 44 years old) contracted the disease through heterosexual contact. About 38 percent of infected women acquired AIDS through injecting drug use.

*(Source: New York State Department of Health)*

National statistics show that:

- Black Americans are seven times more likely than White Americans to become newly infected with HIV, according to an August CDC report. The report concluded "Blacks are more heavily and disproportionately affected by HIV than any other racial/ethnic group in the U.S."
- AIDS remains the leading cause of death among Black women between 25-34 years and the second leading cause of death in black men between 35-44 years.
- Black women in the U.S. were 23 times more likely than White women to be diagnosed with AIDS in 2005, according to the CDC.

*(Source: CDC HIV/AIDS National Statistical Report)*

In the face of these alarming statistics, the federal government's response has been woefully inadequate, Fields said. She cited statistics released at the U.S. Conference on AIDS held in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in September showing that funding for the Ryan White Care Act, which helps the uninsured living with the disease to get medical treatment, has barely increased over the past six years. During that time period, funding for the federal government's Minority AIDS Initiative has remained flat – a period in which more than 200,000 people of color became infected with HIV in the United States.

*The National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS was founded in 1987 to inform, coordinate and organize the volunteer efforts of the indigenous Black leadership to meet the challenge of fighting HIV/AIDS in their local communities. For more information, visit [www.nblca.org](http://www.nblca.org).*