

Contact: Dan Holly
Jerry Thomas Public Relations
dan@jerrythomaspr.com
(919) 448-8221

Jerry Thomas
Jerry Thomas Public Relations
jerry@jerrythomaspr.com
(312) 285-5166

For immediate release:

Rochester community leaders galvanize to highlight AIDS' impact and to demand action

Rochester – To mark World AIDS Day (Dec. 1), the Black Leadership Commission on AIDS of Rochester and the Black Men Latino Men's Health Crisis (BMLMHC), in collaboration with the Black AIDS Institute, is hosting an International AIDS Post Update Conference. The purpose of this conference is to increase access for the minority community to current global and domestic HIV/AIDS trends.

The conference will be held on Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2008, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Aeon Baptist Church, 175 Genesee Street, Rochester. Presenters at this conference will include: Rev. James L. Cherry, pastor of Aeon and chairman of Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (BLCA) of Rochester; Rev. Kahli Mootoo, National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS; a representative from the Black AIDS Institute, Mr. Don Brunner of BMLMHC; and Mr. LaRon Nelson Associate Director, Monroe County Department of Health and Vice Medical Chair of BLCA of Rochester. This event is free of charge and open to the general public.

Also, BLCA of Rochester and Action For a Better Community will host a conference to honor women who have been affected and/or infected by HIV on **Dec. 13 from 8:30 AM to 1:30 p.m., at the Unity Health Systems, 89 Genesee Street.** This event also is free of charge and open to the general public.

For more information about either of these events, call Rev. Cherry at (585) 436-0990.

The Black Leadership Commission on AIDS of Rochester is an affiliate of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (NBLCA), 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, 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 stop 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. Cherry.

“This disease poses such a threat to all ages, and now it’s spreading to seniors but it’s definitely a threat to teens,” Rev. Cherry said. “This disease holds a death threat to the lives of our people. Those of us who are concerned about our community, about our brothers and sisters, should be involved with the fight against HIV/AIDS. We encourage members of our community to get tested and to attend this conference.”

State statistics show:

- African-American women make up almost three fifths (61.4 percent) of the women with AIDS in Rochester. White women make up approximately twenty three percent (22.9 percent) of women with AIDS in Rochester.
- Among women in Rochester in their child bearing years – 13 through 44 – African-American women make up 61.9 percent of the women with AIDS. White women make up 23 percent of the women of child-bearing age with AIDS, while Hispanic women make up 14.6 percent of the women with AIDS in their child-bearing years.
- There are only eleven children under the age of 13 with AIDS in Rochester. Of these children, eight (72.7 percent) are African American children. Hispanic children (18.2 percent) and White children (9.1 percent) represent the remaining children under the age of 13 with AIDS in Rochester.

(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.