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ACT UP chapter forms to address failure in AIDS leadership

May 5, 2009
Madison, WI

A chapter of the HIV/AIDS advocacy group, ACT UP has formed in Madison. ACT UP Wisconsin is being formed by a group of Wisconsin residents who are living with HIV/AIDS as well as friends, family members and others who are supportive of an expanded community voice in Wisconsin HIV prevention, care and treatment services.

Bob Bowers, Founder of HIVictorious, a Madison based organization that does youth HIV prevention education states "the formation of an ACT UP chapter comes at a critical time in our history. Over 27 years into the epidemic those of us living with HIV/AIDS find ourselves having a limited voice in the decision making process regarding HIV/AIDS services in Wisconsin"

Of immediate concern to the Wisconsin ACT UP chapter is addressing the growing disparity in directly provided HIV services in Madison and the surrounding thirteen county southern public health region when compared to the rest of the state.

Bowers continues, "While our immediate concern is addressing the disparity of services provided in southern Wisconsin, the formation of ACT UP Wisconsin is meant to send a clear message to elected and appointed officials as well as the agencies charged with providing HIV prevention, treatment and care services that we intend to hold them accountable. The voice of the HIV/AIDS community has been silenced long enough."

Greg Milward a Madison resident living with AIDS and a former director of the Madison based AIDS Network concurs with Bowers, stating "last year I resigned from the AIDS Network board of directors due to concerns regarding the direction of the agency and the lack of directly provided services. It has since become clear that the issue is much larger and involves failures of the state AIDS/HIV Program and our elected officials" Milward continues "The formation of an ACT UP chapter is much needed in Wisconsin and will allow those living with HIV/AIDS to have an expanded voice in charting the course of HIV/AIDS services in Wisconsin."

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Della Haugen, a local community organizer and former coordinator of AIDS Network's annual AIDS Ride states "ACT UP provided much needed community input during the early years of the AIDS epidemic. While the issues are different today than 27 years ago, there is a re-emergence of the sense of urgency to address the current issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in Wisconsin." Haugen continues "We need to remind our elected and appointed officials in Wisconsin that we must not lose sight of the lessons learned from those early AIDS activists who formed the original chapters of ACT UP---that the voice of those living with HIV/AIDS and those who support them in their communities is an essential part of charting the course for HIV services in the months and years to come. We will not be silenced."

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Note: Additional background can be accessed at <http://wisconsinhiv.com>