

THE A.I.D.S. EMERGENCY COALITION

c/o
1345 Vernon Road
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19150
215-224-5128

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Blacks Suffer Most AIDS Cases
Are Not Getting Services, Group Charges**

Contact: David Fair 735-1300 days/224-5128 tape

Agencies serving AIDS victims have no program for non-whites or non-white staff despite the fact that 55.1% of all Philadelphia AIDS cases are black, Hispanic or Asian, it was reported today.

The AIDS Emergency Coalition, an ad hoc community group, also charged that the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force, which is under contract with the city Health Department to provide AIDS surveillance and social services, has refused to hire qualified blacks for staff positions even though the majority of its service constituency is black, Hispanic or Asian.

According to Philadelphia Health Department figures issued April 4th, of the 278 city AIDS cases, 135 (48.6%) are black, 17 (6.1%) are Hispanic and 1 (0.4%) is Asian. The remaining 125 cases (45%) are white, according to the statistics.

The Coalition charged that of 17 staff positions at the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force, only one employee is black, and he is hired only as a "case-counter" keeping track of the number of AIDS cases reported in the city. Most of the staff positions are funded by grants from the Centers for Disease Control and the Philadelphia

**Blacks Suffer Most AIDS Cases
Are Not Getting Services, Group Charges**

page two

City Council.

David Fair, a spokesman for the Coalition, called the failure of the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force (PATF) to develop programs and hire staff aimed at confronting the problems of AIDS in the black community "reprehensible and indefensible."

"AIDS has gone from being considered a white man's disease to a disease that disproportionately victimizes blacks and other minorities," Fair said, noting that blacks comprise only 38% of the city's population. "There are many reasons for that, but perhaps the most glaring is the utter failure of PATF and other agencies to develop specific strategies to inform minority communities about risk reduction and to share the tools of protection and prevention beyond the segregated community of white gay men."

Fair said that "as a disease with no medical cure and no protective vaccine, the only prevention against AIDS is education." But PATF and other educational efforts have focussed almost solely on health care professionals and white gay men, he continued, "while they refuse to spend money or staff energy in developing similar educational campaigns among minorities." Fair said that while PATF is willing to hire 16 white staff to work on AIDS education and outreach, it has said that efforts in the black community should be pursued by volunteers.

The Coalition noted that while organizations such as "Black and White Men Together" (BWMT) and "Blacks Educating Blacks About Sexual Health Issues" (BEBASHI) have made done some AIDS education in the black community, they are volunteer organizations with no

Blacks Suffer Most AIDS Cases
Are Not Getting Services, Group Charges

page three

resources for paid staff or professional skills like those available to PATF. Neither organization provides "buddy services," financial support, counseling or the other social services available through PATF.

Fair noted that early efforts to combat AIDS were based almost solely "in the organized, white gay male community." However, Fair continued, "no similar movement has ever been developed among blacks or minorities, and the fundamentally white, middle-class-and-above orientation of the gay movement makes it unlikely that it will ever become relevant to the average black male at risk of contracting AIDS."

Fair said that "the fact that the gay community is mostly segregated makes it clear that services based in that community alone will not reach the majority of those getting this disease, and makes it imperative that PATF and other publicly-funded resources be dedicated urgently to developing emergency strategies to combat AIDS among non-whites."

The AIDS Emergency Coalition is comprised of concerned members of the community who have organized to "educate, advocate and agitate on behalf of minority people to achieve full and equal access to AIDS services," according to the group's "Statement of Principles."

-end-