



MBK focused on HIV testing reaching "all populations"

Group hosts free HIV testing at multiple sites Nov 30 – Dec 1

By Reggie S. Davis
Communications Manager MBK

Public conversations about the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can be a mixture of sound knowledge and divisive rhetoric. However, with the evolution of newer, more efficient strategies being implemented by public health policymakers aimed at reducing the prevalence of HIV infection in vulnerable populations, organizations like MBK are uniquely positioned to address the stigmas associated with the virus and the people who live with it through their community-based testing approach.

From November 30 and leading up to World AIDS Day (Dec 1) My Brother's Keeper, Incorporated Center for Community-Based Programs will provide free HIV testing at several sites locally, giving participants the opportunity to know their status and gain valuable information to help reduce the transmission of HIV.

Gerald Gibson, Community Outreach and testing manager for MBK, believes that in order to begin erasing stigma agencies "must encompass testing" and become "culturally component" of the populations most at-risk of contracting HIV.

"We are trying to reach all populations," said Gibson. "Any kind of needs [people living with HIV] have – from a community-based stand point – once they receive post-coun-



(L-R) Gerald Gibson, outreach and testing manager and a former AmeriCorps intern offer HIV testing.

seling they will be connected to any needs they have. And, from there they are linked to the clinic. That's for persons who are negative or positive."

In 2010, the CDC reported that the Mississippi incidence of HIV infection is six times higher in African Americans

than in whites, and revealed that the state ranked no. 3 nationally for having the most reported cases of HIV.

However, shared misinformation between unknowledgeable residents can interfere with outreach initiatives in the community, leading to harm-

ful stigmas, which can prevent at-risk sexually active men and women from seeking treatment.

According to WorldAIDS-Day.org, the mission is to bolster "worldwide" unity in the fight against HIV. For 2016, the theme HIV STIGMA: Not

Retro, Just Wrong, highlights the harmful attitudes shared by misinformed persons worldwide, and the impact stigmatization has on the lives of people living with HIV.

"[HIV] is dismantling the African-American community, especially gay and bisexual men," said Gibson. "And, this is not to leave out women and youths of color – HIV is a disease of opportunity, not sexual orientation."

MBK hosted testing opportunities at Tougaloo College, twice on Nov. 30 and partnered with Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority Incorporated and Holmes Community College in Ridgeland, to conduct free testing and a panel discussion.

Beyond the efforts by MBK, Inc. which are devoted to decelerating the rate at which new HIV infections occur among Mississippi's population of MSM (men who have sex with men), Charlotte Norwood, patient navigator for MBK, Inc. notes a need for more frequent testing of black women who are tested for HIV or who receive support services.

"The reality is women are still getting infected from loving someone who is HIV positive and does not know [their status]," said Norwood. "PrEP is being pushed for women as well because they are at a very

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Hinds County voters deliver change in election runoff

What a difference three weeks make

By Othor Cain
Contributing Writer

Voters in Hinds County braved the stormy weather Nov. 29 as they returned to the polls to make the final decision as to whom will serve on the Board of Election Commissioners for the next four years.

What is usually a very low-key and often overlooked race, this year proved differently for election commissioners as more voters were engaged and made aware of the duties and responsibilities of the job.

When voters initially cast their ballots earlier this month in Hinds County Districts 1, 2 and 5, no candidate received 50 percent plus one of the votes, thus requiring a runoff.

In District 1, three weeks ago (Nov. 8), voters suggested they wanted change. In a three-person race, political newcomer Evelyn Reed received 7,866 votes or 43.37 percent, incumbent James Reed received 6,032 votes or 33.26 percent, while community activist Ineva May Pittman received 4,015 votes or 22.14 percent.

Tuesday, with a very low-



Reed



Johnson



Little

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Secrecy surrounding review of MAEP formula is worrisome

By Nancy Loomer
President, The Parents' Campaign

In mid-October, House Speaker Philip Gunn and Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves announced that they were undertaking a review and possible rewrite of the school funding formula, the Mississippi Adequate Education Program. Through a no-bid contract, they hired EdBuild, a young firm with little experience, to examine the current law and recommend changes.

When news outlet *Mississippi Today* requested a copy of the EdBuild contract, the legislative leadership refused to make it public, only to reverse its decision and comply with the re-

quest after an Attorney General opinion found them in violation of the Mississippi Accountability and Transparency Act.

Gunn and Reeves promised recommendations from EdBuild within two short months, both interrupted by holidays, and indicated changes will be made in the 2017 Legislative Session.

When the MAEP was crafted, the authors took years to formulate the model, rewriting it again and again to accommodate meaningful input they received through numerous public hearings across Mississippi.

The one public hearing to date on this new rewrite was held with only three days' notice, in Jackson, during the work day – preventing most parents and teachers from attending.

The meeting was halted after 72 minutes, and many who had rearranged their schedules to be there were not allowed to speak. No other public meetings have been announced.

School funding could "follow the child" to private academies. It's hard to predict what changes to our school funding formula EdBuild might recommend.

The firm's web site promotes school funding formulas that are "student centered" and structured in a way that makes it easier for school funding to "follow the child." Many suspect that this is a dangerous move toward privatization in the form of

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A village approach to ending HIV stigma in Mississippi

By Mauda Monger
MS AIDS Education Training Ctr.

Today, we celebrate globally the 28th annual World AIDS Day. More than 35 million people have died of AIDS, and 28 years ago it was designated that a day should be set aside to celebrate and commemorate lives lost to one of the most tragic diseases ever to attack globally. But yet 30-something years later into the epidemic, still no cure is on the horizon.

One may look at this in a way as grim and hopeless, however after 12 plus years in this field my view is just the opposite.

In 2010, President Barack Obama designated the United

States' first HIV/AIDS strategy which holds the idea that we should here in the United States have a platform that addresses stigma, prevention and treatment. With the idea that if we address stigma as a major part of the disease, we can in turn prevent the transmission through treatment and early detection. Nationally this gave us a formula that begin with prevention and ends with viral suppression.

For the state of Mississippi, this formula has made some impact, but not nearly enough. As of the 2014 data, we have had a 14 percent increase in HIV cases, and Jackson consistently ranks in the top 5 of U.S. cities with increased HIV case rates. In 2014, youth aged

13 to 24 accounted for an estimated 22 percent of all new HIV diagnoses in the United States, that's 1 in 5 new HIV diagnosis.

According to the CDC, 58 percent of Mississippi students note they have had sex at least once by the 12th grade, resulting in the second-highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation.

Mississippi has the 2nd highest rates of both chlamydia and gonorrhea in the nation and is among the highest HIV diagnosis rates of HIV for black men 13-24 years of age.

As director of the Mississippi AIDS Education Training Center, my goal is to improve

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