



Prepared Statement for the Record

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***The Domestic Epidemic is Worse than We Thought:  
a wake-Up Call for HIV Prevention***

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments for the record. For over 20 years, the Puerto Rico AIDS Surveillance System has produced statistical information on the epidemic. Successful HIV treatment delays the progression of HIV infection to AIDS. As a result, the CDC advised in 1999 that state and local governments conduct confidential name-based HIV surveillance as part of their AIDS surveillance activities. In response, the Puerto Rico government required mandatory reporting of new HIV infections, thereby setting up a confidential name-based HIV surveillance system in Puerto Rico, even before the CDC's advice to the states was strengthened in 2005.

Over 7,000 new HIV infections have been reported through the Puerto Rico HIV/AIDS Surveillance System to date. The System allows the local health authorities to match new cases with treatment programs immediately, thereby improving chances that adequate care can slow or even reverse the progression to AIDS. As such, the Puerto Rico HIV/AIDS Surveillance System saves lives. Without HIV surveillance in Puerto Rico, thousands of new HIV infection cases that have been reported through the System potentially would have gone

undetected and untreated. This is particularly disconcerting given HIV/AIDS mortality in Puerto Rico is over three times higher than in the United States.

HIV Surveillance in Puerto Rico also allows local policymakers to design effective prevention programs designed for the island's high-risk population. For instance, among adolescent and adult males residing in Puerto Rico, the principal mechanism of HIV transmission is Injection Drug Use (IDU). IDU cases account for 45 percent of all new cases in Puerto Rico, a population to which prevention initiatives such as needle-exchange programs may be best suited. This is in contrast to state-side statistics for the same group, where less than 15 percent of new cases are related to IDU. Instead, the principal mechanism of HIV transmission in the United States is male-to-male sexual contact, accounting for more than half of the cases in the Hispanic population and over two-thirds of the cases across all population. Thus, programs that promote safe sex may be better suited for the population that resides in the States. The Puerto Rico HIV/AIDS Surveillance System is thus vital to ensuring prevention efforts are effective in Puerto Rico.

Already, too many federal statistical programs overlook Puerto Rico. For instance, the *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey* also does not extend to Puerto Rico. However, the Puerto Rico HIV/AIDS Surveillance System is not just any statistical program. It monitors the epidemic in one of the regions with the highest concentration of HIV cases.

Mr. Chairman, as the Executive Director of the Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics, I urge Congress to renew the funding for HIV surveillance efforts in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics is charged with the responsibility of ensuring universal and timely access to reliable and comprehensive statistical information on Puerto Rico. I sincerely hope the House Committee on Government Oversight and Reform finds these comments useful and that they be taken into consideration when designing plans to address the concerns raised in this hearing. Thank you.