

## **For Immediate Release**

### **Ron Clark, CEO of RAP, Inc. Calls for Commitment to Citywide Support for HIV/AIDS Services and Prevention in Recognition of World AIDS Day**

Washington, D. C., November 12, 2006...Ron Clark, Executive Director of RAP, Inc. today issued a statement calling on Washingtonians to demand a comprehensive, long term, citywide plan to stop the AIDS epidemic. Clark said, "As we begin this season of giving thanks and performing much needed acts of charity, let us all remember those who are suffering from AIDS. Let us be clear that the suffering is preventable. Let us do our part in bringing the suffering to a halt."

The statement continued:

Decades after the world has become aware of AIDS, new infections among citizens of Washington, D. C. continues to grow at a rate 10 times the national average and is now thought to be the highest rate of any major city in the country. Washingtonians are being infected at a horrendous rate. Nearly 1 out of every 50 people in the District is now living with AIDS, according to a 2005 report published by the D. C. Appleseed Center, HIV/AIDS in the Nation's Capital.

Much is known about how to prevent AIDS; not nearly enough is being done to prevent this terrible disease.

Regional Addiction Prevention, Inc. was the first residential treatment facility in the city serving intravenous drug users with HIV/AIDS. This has been the case for more than 20 of the 35 years we have served the community by providing substance abuse treatment, prevention and education. And before the country knew the name AIDS, people seeking drug treatment came into the facility with other symptoms that kept them sick. HIV/AIDS has been a deadly reality for drug users from the beginning of this scourge. Injection drug use is the second most common method of HIV transmission among men and the most common method of transmission among women, according to the Appleseed report.

There is a proven way to significantly reduce the spread of the disease among injection drug users. That is to provide sterile needles to people who are injecting drugs.

**Yet, this simple and proven solution is not allowed.**

A cruel mandate from the United States Congress forbids it. Appleseed said it this way, ACongress has barred the District from using federal or local public funds to support the distribution of sterile injection equipment. Therefore, only private funds may be used to support this activity. Research has shown that SEPs (Syringe Exchange Programs) receiving government funding are more effective at reducing HIV transmission... because... [they] are far more likely to distribute enough sterile syringes to meet the demand and to provide multiple complementary services necessary for a comprehensive HIV prevention network...@ Plus, it is against D. C. law for pharmacies to sell syringes to persons if a pharmacist believes the implement will be used to inject drugs!

The public must understand the extent of the problem and get angry about it.

1 in 20 adults in the city is infected; 1 in 7 of those are African American men; infections among heterosexual women are on the increase; our school children are being infected at an alarming rate. In fact, **any** rate is too large.

Key to ending the epidemic is education and action. There must be real and meaningful change. AIDS prevention and services for persons already suffering from the disease must be on the agenda of every political leader. Citizens must ask the questions and hold the politicians accountable.

We **all** have an opportunity to help bring about real and meaningful change by taking a stand.