

## Himes Advocates Funding For AIDS Cure

By Katie King

STAMFORD -- U.S. Jim Himes visited the McKinney Residence on Woodland Place on Monday to drum up support for his Cure for AIDS Act, which would create a \$100 million federal research program dedicated to curing the disease.

Himes, a Democrat representing Fairfield County, co-sponsored the bill last year with California U.S. Barbara Lee. The Cure for AIDS Act would designate \$100 million over a five-year period for AIDS research managed by the Department of Defense.

"We are within striking distance of a cure for HIV," Himes said.

The representative was joined Monday by Rowena Johnston, vice president of research for the Foundation for AIDS Research, based in New York. AIDS was considered a death sentence 20 years ago, but patients are now living "reasonably normal" lives thanks to tremendous advances in medical treatment, she said.

"We really believe a cure is within reach," Johnston said.

A California man and Mississippi toddler are both considered to have been cured of AIDS in recent years, Johnston said. Curing the more than 1 million Americans now living with AIDS, she said, requires expensive medical research into gene therapy, vaccination and drug treatment, however. "I believe most researchers think it will be some combination of those three things," Johnston said. "Science has brought us a lot of answers, but we do face roadblocks, politically and socially."

Himes said curing AIDS will be expensive, but ultimately more affordable than simply continuing to treat the disease. It costs an estimated \$360,000 to treat one person for HIV alone, and many AIDS patients are also susceptible to other expensive medical conditions such as cancer or lung infections.

"This just makes economic sense," Himes said.



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Himes and Lee first introduced the Cure for AIDS Act last year, but the legislation failed to gain traction. This time, Himes said, he needs to attract more co-sponsors and build public awareness and support for the bill in order to move it through Congress.



Inspirica, an organization that serves and advocates for the homeless, hosted Monday's event at Stamford's McKinney Residence, which provides housing and support services to 15 people living with AIDS. McKinney Residence, which opened in 1989, was the first AIDS housing program in Connecticut, and named in memory of former Connecticut U.S. Rep. Stewart McKinney, who died of AIDS.

While the Cure for AIDS Act would designate funding solely for medical research, Himes underscored the importance of support services and treatment programs.

"Absent a cure, the second best thing we can do is prevent AIDS, and that's why funding is so important," he said. "If we cut those funds, as night follows day the number of infections will go up. That's tragic, and it also costs more money."

**About Inspirica:** Inspirica is one of the largest providers of services to the homeless in the state of Connecticut and the largest in lower Fairfield County. It provides emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and affordable housing to approximately 235-250 people each night. Additionally, it provides education & employment services, youth services and access to a vast array of other services such medical and dental care, in-patient substance abuse treatment, psychiatric care, etc., through a network of formal, strategic partnerships. <http://inspicact.org/>

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