

U.S. Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard
Bienestar/CHC Briefing on Latinos and HIV/AIDS
April 29, 2008

"It is a pleasure to welcome you to the third annual Congressional Briefing on Latinos and HIV/AIDS.

I thank my good friend Hilda Solis and her staff for facilitating this briefing for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

And I thank Oscar and the Bienestar staff for bringing together this impressive group of experts to speak about the HIV crisis in the Hispanic community.

I also commend Bienestar for its longstanding commitment to enhance the health and well-being of Latino and underserved communities through badly needed culturally suitable HIV/AIDS services.

As a leader in bringing appropriate and timely HIV testing, counseling and treatment to hard-to-reach persons, Bienestar is a beacon of hope and comfort to HIV-positive individuals and their families throughout Southern California.

To this distinguished group that has gathered here to discuss key areas of concern about Latinos in the United States with HIV/AIDS, your presence couldn't be more welcomed.

Your expertise, first hand experiences and advocacy are invaluable to me and my colleagues, especially those of us who sit on the Appropriations Committee and are preparing the Fiscal Year 2009 Appropriation bills.

As you know, the President's budget recommendation of a mere \$1 million increase for the Ryan White CARE Act, doesn't keep up with inflation, and comes at a time infections are rising and demand for services are increasing.

This proposed lack of investment by the President will have the greatest impact on HIV infected Latinos already disproportionately affected by this epidemic and, who, as studies show, face greater barriers to care than their white counterparts.

As a member of the House Appropriation Subcommittee on Homeland Security, I am particularly pleased that today's focus is on the issue of travel, immigration and detention.

As I highlighted during a hearing with the Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the treatment of detainees with HIV/AIDS is unconscionable, and deadly as was in the case of Victoria Arellano, a male-to-female transgender person, who died in ICE custody at the San Pedro Processing Center in July 2007.

According to accounts by detainees who witnessed the events leading up to Victoria's death, ICE did not respond in a timely manner to numerous and increasingly desperate requests for urgent medical attention made by Arellano and her fellow detainees as her condition deteriorated in the weeks prior to her death.

I take this opportunity to commend ACLU and Human Rights Watch for their outstanding work in looking into this tragic case to determine whether discrimination or cultural insensitivity played a role in ICE agents' refusal to provide her with her needed HIV medication.

I am pleased that they will be on the second panel to further discuss how the United States is failing to comply with recognized standards for correctional health care.

Again, I welcome and thank you for being a part of today's briefing on Latinos and HIV/AIDS.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and my colleagues to ensure that Latinos and all HIV infected persons are treated with respect and receive the information, testing, treatment and care they need in a compassionate and culturally appropriate manner.

And equally as important, I look forward to working with you to de-stigmatize HIV/AIDS and prevent new infections."

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