

[Letterhead]

[Contact]

[Title]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear [Policy Maker]

We are contacting you to request a meeting to discuss our local syphilis elimination activities in support of the national Syphilis Elimination Effort (SEE). This effort is part of a broader National Plan to Eliminate Syphilis from the United States. The SEE aims to eliminate syphilis through partnerships with state and local health departments, health care providers, and community- and faith-based organizations.

Contrary to the general belief that it is a disease of the past, syphilis affects the health of many Americans— including a disproportionate number in our community— and can have devastating effects. Syphilis sores make it easier to transmit and get HIV infection by 2- to 5-fold. Syphilis can also be transmitted from mother-to-child during pregnancy (congenital syphilis). Depending on how long a pregnant woman has been infected, she has a good chance of having a stillbirth (a baby born dead) or of giving birth to a baby with irreversible congenital deformities. If the baby is not treated immediately, it may become developmentally delayed, have seizures, or die.

Fortunately, syphilis is treatable and curable, and early treatment can prevent these harmful outcomes. Syphilis prevention methods (or strategies) can include abstinence, monogamy, i.e., being faithful to a single sex partner, or using condoms consistently and correctly. These approaches can avoid risk (abstinence) or effectively reduce risk for syphilis (monogamy, consistent and correct condom use).

Communities of color are disproportionately affected by syphilis, with rates as much as 5.2 times higher among African Americans than among non-Hispanic whites (7.8 versus 1.5 cases/ 100,000 people) in 2003. Currently, syphilis is concentrated in a small number of counties in the U.S.— most of them are urban or in the South. In 2003, 18 counties and one city accounted for half of the reported syphilis cases in this country, and our community is one of these sites. In 2003, our community reported a syphilis rate of ___cases/100,000 people, which is unacceptable.

A national cost analysis conducted in 1996 found that syphilis imposes a significant public health burden at a considerable cost to society. More than \$966 million in direct and indirect costs is spent each year in the United States because of syphilis, including adult syphilis (\$185.5 million,) congenital syphilis (\$28.5 million,) and HIV attributed to syphilis (\$752.2 million).

The elimination of syphilis from our community, let alone the U.S., would be a landmark achievement. It would directly improve the health of many Americans and decrease one of the most glaring racial disparities in health. It will also improve community health status by removing an important factor that facilitates the spread of HIV and by preventing miscarriages, stillbirths and multi-system disorders caused by congenital syphilis.

Because syphilis tends to rebound in 7- to 10-year cycles, we must seize this opportunity to eliminate syphilis now - while rates are still relatively low. To accomplish that, we must build and maintain awareness at the local, state and federal levels until we get rid of syphilis. We would like to arrange a meeting with one of your staff to provide additional information on the syphilis elimination activities in our community. We plan to call your office in the next few days to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,