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April 7, 2011

Senator Roderick Wright
Room 5064, California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
FAX: 916-445-3712

Copy to Mia Orr, Senate Health Committee Consultant, **FAX: 916-324-9384**

RE: SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 422

Dear Senator Wright:

The California Academy of Preventive Medicine strongly supports SB 422, which we think will help health care providers, patients, and public health departments to communicate about HIV for public health purposes for the prevention of new infections, without fear that they are violating the law. By facilitating communication and disclosure among health departments, health care providers, and patients, this bill can result in more complete and accurate surveillance to track who is being infected with HIV, so that preventive efforts can be targeted to the people at risk. It will also make it easier for local public health departments to investigate outbreaks and to find and notify contacts who may have already been exposed to HIV. Our Board of Directors was unanimous in supporting this bill on March 28, 2011.

Our Academy is the official state specialty society for physicians in the fields of public health and preventive medicine. We have a broad perspective on the issue of communication about HIV cases, because our membership includes local health officers, physicians who work on HIV and other disease control at local health departments, physicians who work with communicable diseases at the state Department of Public Health, and providers in the community who treat patients with HIV and other communicable diseases. Some of our members have also worked at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

SB 422 permits local health departments to confidentially discuss HIV cases and who else may have been exposed to them, with the patients' health care providers, and to directly communicate with patients, for purposes of investigation, control, and surveillance of HIV. This should lead to

more information about exposed persons who should be brought in for testing, counseling, and (if already infected) treatment. It should help to stop outbreaks and prevent further transmission. Such communication will also result in more complete HIV reports on cases, which will help to safeguard federal Ryan White funding for California that is dependent on complete and timely reporting.

The bill also permits local public health staff involved with tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases to better deal with preventing further transmission, when anyone is infected with both HIV and either tuberculosis, syphilis, gonorrhea, or Chlamydia. When someone is “coinfected” with both HIV and one of those diseases, prevention and treatment become more complicated. In such cases, SB 422 will permit local public health agencies to share with the state Department of Public Health information about other persons with HIV who may either have been the sources of infection or contacts of the persons who have been infected with both HIV and one of these other diseases. The shared information between counties and the state can result in better tracking and prevention for both the HIV and the tuberculosis and the sexually transmitted diseases.

For other reportable diseases, a bill like this would not even be necessary, but because of penalties for unauthorized disclosure of HIV, it is important to make it clear in the law who can disclose information to whom.

Once again, we applaud your introduction of SB 422 and fully support the bill. Please consult with us on any future amendments, as our input may be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eric Walsh".

Eric Walsh, MD, MPH, President
California Academy of Preventive Medicine