New York Senate Passes HIV/AIDS Affordable Housing Bill

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The New York State Senate passed on April 27 a landmark bill that would create affordable housing protection for HIV-positive New Yorkers and their families. The measure would cap “shelter costs” (rent and utilities) to 30 percent of income for people living with HIV/AIDS who receive public assistance.

The bill now heads to Governor David Paterson, who has already promised to sign it into law when it reaches his desk.

At present, thousands of New Yorkers receiving rental assistance through the HIV/AIDS Services Administration pay between 50 to 85 percent of their disability income toward rent each month.

“Paying over two thirds of my disability check towards rent each month means real sacrifices,” said New York City AIDS Housing Network leader Gerald De Younge in a statement. He pays 68 percent of his Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) check toward rent. “Not only do I walk everywhere because I can’t afford subway fare, I walk in shoes that are worn through because I can’t afford to replace them. I haven’t bought new clothes in three years. I can’t afford basic toiletries like toothpaste. I worry about getting to all my doctor’s appointments and dealing with co-pays. And if this bill isn’t signed into law soon, I worry about whether I can keep up with my rent and stay in my home.”

The bill first passed the Senate last July following a powerful speech by Senator Tom Duane (D–Manhattan), the first HIV-positive and the first openly gay member of the New York State Senate. It passed the New York State Assembly earlier this year.

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