NY Bill to Make HIV Tests More Routine

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A proposed New York state law designed to make HIV testing a regular part of doctor visits has AIDS advocacy groups divided on whether it would benefit groups most at-risk for transmission, including minorities, the *Democrat and Chronicle* reports.

The proposed legislation requires that people between the ages of 18 and 64 be offered an HIV test during medical care in hospital emergency rooms, outpatient clinics and community health centers. If this bill goes into effect, patients will check a box on a general medical consent form instead of giving written consent before an HIV test.

But some AIDS organizations that represent black and Latino people maintain that the changes don't go far enough and that the remaining paperwork will still hinder testing.

"What we're saying is, Routine testing is when you go to a doctor and get a blood work-up, and HIV should be among those [illnesses] tested," said C. Virginia Fields, chief executive officer and president of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (NBLCA). The group joins 70 other organizations and community leaders opposed to the bill.

However, other AIDS groups support the proposed legislation, which is sponsored in the Senate by Tom Duane, an openly gay, HIV-positive legislator. The president and chief executive officer of the Community Healthcare Network, Catherine Abate, said, "We have not found informed consent a barrier to getting someone tested."

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