NYC Bill Introduced to Expand HIV-Related Welfare Benefits

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New York City Council member Corey Johnson introduced legislation that would expand benefits to all low-income residents living with HIV, according to a press release by activist group VOCAL-NY.

Currently, only people with an AIDS diagnosis are eligible to receive benefits from the HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA). Benefits range from rental assistance and support services to food and transportation allowances.

Dubbed the “HASA for All” bill, the legislation is needed because it would help low-income HIV-positive people take better care of their health while also stopping the spread of the virus.

“HIV/AIDS is a disease of inequities,” said Johnson, chair of the City Council’s Health Committee, in the release. “Poverty, homelessness and a lack of access to health care are conditions that fuel the epidemic. The inability to meet housing, food and other basic subsistence needs results in disconnection from HIV care, failure to achieve and maintain viral suppression, an increased risk of transmitting HIV to others. Our shared vision of ending the AIDS epidemic in our state by 2020 will remain out of reach if we do not provide persons living with HIV access to proven intervention strategies.”

Johnson, according to the release, is the only openly HIV-positive elected official in New York State. He introduced the bill with a coalition of supporters, including City Council member Stephen Levin and VOCAL-NY.

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