



NEWS from the Shelby County Mayor's Office

Lee Harris, Mayor

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MEDIA ADVISORY

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SHELBY COUNTY MAYOR LEE HARRIS AND THE SHELBY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT TO FORM THE NEW HIVE (HIV EQUITY) COALITION TO DISCUSS THE IMPACT OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE'S REFUSAL OF FEDERAL FUNDS FOR HIV CARE AND PREVENTION

The HIV Equity Coalition, or HIVE Coalition, brings stakeholders together for serious engagement about the current problems facing those with HIV, how the state's refusal of funds will impact vulnerable populations, and how local government and community members can support organizations.



WHO: Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris, Shelby County Health Director Dr. Michelle Taylor, and representatives from HIV community-based organizations, nonprofits, and policy groups

WHAT: Announcement of HIVE Coalition and discussion of current problems facing people living with HIV

WHEN: 11:00 a.m., Wednesday, March 22, 2023

WHERE: Via Zoom, Register [here](#)

Shelby County, TN – On Wednesday, March 22, 2023, Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris and Shelby County Health Director Dr. Michelle Taylor will host a panel discussion for representatives from community-based organizations and announce the formation of the HIV Equity Coalition, or HIVE Coalition. The coalition comes in light of the State of Tennessee’s refusal of federal funds for HIV care and prevention. The HIVE Coalition will engage area stakeholders to discuss the current problems facing people with HIV and how Governor Bill Lee, the State of Tennessee, and Health Commissioner Ralph Alvarado’s refusal to accept nearly \$10 million in federal funds for HIV care and prevention will impact patients and vulnerable populations. The HIVE Coalition will also discuss ways for the community and local officials to help support organizations following the state’s destructive decision.

The HIV epidemic is still impacting our state and region. In fact, The CDC has specifically targeted Shelby County in its Ending HIV Initiative because it is one of 50 areas in the country that account for more than half of new HIV cases yearly. According to HIV.gov, 1.2 million people in the United States have HIV and 13 percent are unaware they are infected. Funds that provide care for people living with HIV and prevention, like HIV testing, are crucial to stopping the spread of the disease that is still killing hundreds of Tennesseans every year. Without it, we could see reductions in evidence-based community programs, testing, access to services, and clinical closures.

Significant and vital work by organizations in Shelby County like Hope House, Friends for Life, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and Regional One Health are at risk. Those and many other organizations will have to deal with the dilemma of either finding funding resources or close programs and other operations, or, in the case of our health department and hospitals, expect an influx of people seeking care or preventative care for HIV. It also leaves the Shelby County Health Department with fewer reliable community partners, putting a strain on staff and resources. The HIVE Coalition will bring all these stakeholders to the table.

While the HIV epidemic impacts all Tennesseans, many vulnerable communities make up a significant amount of HIV infections including members of the LGBTQIA+ community, African Americans, and members of the Latinx population. Addressing these disparities is the first step of health equity, and we can only do it with the necessary resources. The HIVE Coalition is dedicated to this equity.

Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris: “HIV is nowhere near eradicated in Shelby County or in the State of Tennessee. Shelby County has one of the highest incidence rates of new HIV cases in

the country and the South accounts for more than half of all new HIV cases in the United States. The State of Tennessee's rejection of CDC funds for HIV care and prevention puts Tennesseans at risk for a deadly disease, shows little compassion for people living with HIV, and leaves community organizations unable to serve countless men, women, and children."

Dr. Michelle Taylor, Shelby County Health Department Director: "Shelby County Health Department (SCHD) works to combat the HIV epidemic in our region by providing care to HIV/AIDS patients through the Ryan White Program and prevention services through the Health Department's Sexual Health program. Our existing HIV testing and prevention community partners extend the Health Department's reach where testing is most needed. Interruptions in these programs could put thousands in our community at risk."

Diane Duke, President and CEO of Friends for Life: "At Friends for Life, we are dedicated and work to care for those impacted by HIV and break down the stigma surrounding it. HIV patients can live long, beautiful lives. In part, that is because of the support organizations like Friends for Life receive from federal agencies like the CDC. These funds provide needed care for patients and prevention for those at risk of contracting HIV. We cannot go back. I join Mayor Lee Harris and Shelby County Government to implore the State of Tennessee to accept this funding."

Lenox Warren, CEO of Hope House: "The State of Tennessee's decision to pull federal funding to support HIV care and prevention has a rippling effect in our community. Hope House serves children and families affected by HIV. We know if prevention efforts are at risk, there's a potential to see an uptick in transmission of HIV which can impact our neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family. It's important to know children and families are at risk when crucial funding is rejected. I am thankful for the work Shelby County Government is doing to understand this decision by the State of Tennessee and to reverse it."

(End of Release)