

NEWS RELEASE

Department of External Affairs

MEDIA CONTACT:

Jessica Corbitt-Dominguez, Director

404-612-8303 (office)

404-713-5990 (cell)

jessica.corbitt@fultoncountyga.gov

141 Pryor St. SW, Suite 3090

Atlanta, GA 30303

www.fultoncountyga.gov

<https://twitter.com/FultonInfo>

<https://www.facebook.com/FultonInfo>

January 31, 2019



Fulton County Government

Fulton County Joins Fast-Track Cities Initiative to Reduce New HIV Infections

ATLANTA – On the occasion of the AIDSfree Cities: Global Forum in London, hosted by the Elton John AIDS Foundation, the U.K. Department of Health and Social Care and Department for International Development, today the Chairman of the Fulton County, Georgia Board of Commissioners, Robb Pitts, signed the Paris Declaration on Fast-Track Cities Ending the AIDS Epidemic, joining the city of Atlanta in a joint effort to reduce the rate of new HIV infections in the capital and eliminate discrimination and stigma associated with the disease.

By joining the Fast-Track Cities, Fulton County and the City of Atlanta also demonstrate the importance of working together in addressing an epidemic that recognizes no political boundaries. This partnership is critical to providing a comprehensive and coordinated effort to reducing the impact of HIV in Atlanta since health care services are provided by the Fulton County Board of Health and housing services are provided by the city.

QUOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN “By signing Fulton County up as a Fast-Track City in partnership with the city of Atlanta, we are taking on the challenge to end new HIV infections in the capital by 2030. We must be ambitious, and I am confident that by working together we can achieve this goal” said Pitts. “I am pleased to be joined today by two of my constituents and community partners, Dazon Dixon Diallo of SisterLove, Inc., and Daniel Driffin, THRIVE SS, Inc.” Pitts continued, “Improving the quality of life and wellbeing of those living with HIV in Fulton County is a priority for me, which is why I’m proud to sign this commitment today.”

QUOTE FROM SIR ELTOIN JOHN:

‘I love Atlanta. I’ve had a home there for many years. Visiting the Ponce Center last November and hearing stories of young gay men dying of AIDS before accessing treatment broke my heart.

“I am thrilled that Fulton County and the City of Atlanta have stated their commitment to the Fast Track Cities Initiative at the AIDSfree Cities Global Forum, Co-hosted by my foundation. I applaud their leadership.”

While great progress has been made in many cities around the world in recent years, there remains much work to be done toward ending HIV/AIDS in Atlanta and in the state of Georgia. Statistics show that Atlanta ranks fourth among United States metropolitan cities for new HIV diagnoses and Georgia ranks fifth among states. These numbers are in line with trends seen across the Southern U.S. where, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the region now experiences the greatest burden of HIV infection, illness and death in the United States and lags far behind in providing quality HIV prevention and care and treatment, particularly in rural areas.

As the largest city in the region that houses one of the finest HIV clinics in the U.S., the Ponce Clinic of Grady Health Systems where high-quality care is readily available, the challenge for Atlanta is to get those at risk for HIV tested, referred to and retained on treatment. The stigma and discrimination against HIV and homosexuality, particularly in communities where the burden of disease is greatest, in the Southern U.S. continues to hamper prevention and treatment efforts.

During the event held in London today, the Chairman and representatives from the U.K. government, the Elton John AIDS Foundation, Mayors from other Fast-Track Cities, municipal leaders and advocates reviewed their progress, discussed key challenges and renewed their support of the goals of the initiative.

The results of the London meeting will be shared at a larger meeting of the Fast-Track Cities Initiative in September 2019.

By joining the Fast-Track Cities, the Chairman is committing to work with the Mayor of Atlanta and other partners to:

- Continue working to exceed the United Nation’s 90:90:90 HIV targets (90 percent of people living with HIV know their status, 90 percent of people with diagnosed HIV on treatment, 90 percent of people on treatment with suppressed viral loads)
- End new HIV infections in the capital by 2030
- Put a stop to HIV-related stigma and discrimination
- Stop preventable deaths from HIV-related causes
- Work to improve the health, quality of life and wellbeing of people living with HIV across the capital

The problem is most acute among people of color, who are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS—most notably black gay men, black women and transgender women. The reasons

are a convergence of factors including social issues such as structural inequalities, racism, misogyny, homophobia and HIV stigmatization. Currently, AIDS is the leading cause of death among black people in Georgia ages 35 to 44, according to the Georgia Department of Public Health.

An Emory University study followed a group of Atlanta-area men ages 18 to 39 who had sex with men during 24 months and found that 12.1 percent of the black men under 25 contracted HIV, compared with only 1.0 percent of the white men under 25.

“While many cities in the U.S. have a goal of ZERO new HIV infections, Atlanta has an ongoing epidemic that is nowhere close to abating and, in fact, mirrors what we see in many cities in Africa,” said Carlos del Rio, M.D., co-director of Emory University’s Center for AIDS Research.

Notes to editors

About the Fast-Track Cities Initiative

The Fast-Track Cities initiative is a partnership between high HIV burden cities worldwide and four core partners – the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), and the city of Paris.

The initiative was launched on World AIDS Day (1 December) 2014 with an initial 26 cities signing the Paris Declaration. Today, the Fast-Track Cities initiative currently has over 200 signatories – cities with a significant number of people living with HIV, among which a subset of cities, including Atlanta, are prioritized because progress in those cities could have an impact on national HIV epidemics. Collectively, the program initiative seeks to galvanize action in and solidarity among cities across the world, sharing best practices and tackling stigma and discrimination. The current list of priority Fast-Track Cities is available at www.iapac.org/cities.

Atlanta Statistics:

In 2016, the most current year for which CDC has released surveillance numbers: Metropolitan Atlanta had the highest rate of new diagnoses among Black/African American men who have sex with men and the fourth highest rate of new diagnoses overall.

Atlanta’s high rate of HIV infections has long been compared to that of developing countries, and in December the Centers for Disease Control declared that it’s officially an epidemic.

Some zip codes in the Atlanta area have rates of HIV/AIDS that are six- to eight-times higher than the national average. And by the time patients in Atlanta are diagnosed as HIV positive,

about a quarter have AIDS, which means they have likely been living with the virus for eight to 10 years.

Experts say that a gay black man in the United States has a one in two chance of being diagnosed with HIV. In Atlanta, it is even worse, with those odds perhaps closer to 60 percent. Fast Track Cities commit to increase to 90% the proportion of PLHIV on ART with undetectable viral load – in Atlanta the rate is 54%.

For more Fulton County news, sign up for the weekly e-newsletter #OneFulton at <https://goo.gl/Nb1L84>. You can also visit Fulton County's website at www.fultoncountyga.gov or connect with Fulton County government on Twitter at [@FultonInfo](https://twitter.com/FultonInfo) or Facebook at [@fultoninfo](https://facebook.com/fultoninfo).

###