

Remarks for Public Health Committee Hearing August 17, 2022

Good morning everyone. Many thanks to the leadership in the Public Health Committee for convening this hearing.

My name is Linda Estabrook. I am the Executive Director of the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective. The Health Collective has provided services for the LGBTQ community since 1983. We are one of the legislatively required members of the statewide LGBTQ+ Health and Human Services Network.

Well, here we are. Monkeypox. What do we need now? And I really mean NOW, as in today.

We need a deluge of money to drench this health emergency called Monkeypox. We cannot keep doing this piecemeal. We cannot keep expecting the agencies and health care organizations that have stepped up to address this problem to keep doing what we are doing, without providing the resources needed to really make an impact.

Can you imagine what \$1 million could do? \$2 million? \$10 million?

Are any entities getting paid anything? I don't know. I don't know if the hospitals are getting paid to store and distribute vaccine. I don't know if any vaccine distribution agencies are getting paid. I know we are not getting Monkeypox specific funding from the state.

At the Health Collective we have redirected agency staff resources to Monkeypox. Our small agency has increased our clinic visits four fold. We have increased our staffing by almost 40%. We doubled the amount of clinic hours. We have put out requests for funding to cover these costs, hoping that some of the funding requests are fulfilled. We have not waited for the funding. We have done what needed to be done in the immediacy of the moment.

Money can be used for advertising on the dating apps, like Grindr and Scruff.

Money can boost posts on social media.

It can buy full page ads in print publications in gay resort areas like P-Town and Ogunquit.

Funds can be used to contract with a design/communications firm to develop messaging products including digital ads for display in our organizations and in gay bars. I know my staff and staff of other LGBTQ+ organizations can offer information to help develop the messages.

Funds are needed to pay for the increased staffing and redeployed staffing of vaccine providers and agencies serving the LGBTQ community.

The state has a surplus of money. A significantly funded rainy day fund. It's raining!

These actions are actions we have already taken. The reach needs to be wider. Bigger.

Easier to understand information is needed on the DPH website. Keep all of the necessary required info that the government needs to have. Just add more and easier to understand DIRECT messages, like we have on the Health Collective website. I have asked for at least two weeks to multiple people for DPH to put some basic direct information on their Monkey pox vaccine page. As of earlier today, It's still not there.

Fact: The Monkeypox vaccine, Jynneos, requires two shots, and takes a total of six weeks to be fully effective.

Jynneos will not protect you immediately. You can't get it today and be 'safe' for your trip to P-Town, club night or party on Saturday night. Prevention is still the best way to avoid getting Monkeypox.

I urge DPH to convene regular meetings with all of the vaccine providers in CT. Even a one hour meeting each week can help to make vaccine delivery more consistent. There have been multiple instances of different interpretations of DPH guidance.

I also urge DPH to adopt the steps for all sites that we are using at the Health Collective the vaccine processes: thorough eligibility screening to schedule vaccine appointments; completion of vaccine consent form. Our consent form includes patient acknowledgement statements that include prevention behavior

language and vaccine effectiveness language. Providing vaccine effectiveness flyer after client receives the vaccine. And we have implemented follow up calls on a limited basis.

And messaging NEEDS to go beyond vaccine. Prevention/avoidance/harm reduction messaging needs to happen concurrent with vaccine messaging.

Lastly, and definitely NOT the least important-Security: anti gay rhetoric, lies about monkeypox transmission to kids. These create dangerous circumstances especially for LGBTQ organizations. The State of CT needs to take the lead to interrupt the messages out there.