

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HILDA L. SOLIS

August 2, 2022

Advocating for Federal and State Resources to Combat the STI Epidemic

Los Angeles County is in the midst of an ongoing sexually transmitted infections (STI) crisis that has seen case rates skyrocket over the past decade, with the highest ever annual reported case of syphilis, congenital syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia. Recent data from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health), Division of HIV and STI Programs (DHSP) show a 450% increase in syphilis rates among females and a 235% increase in males in the last decade. Congenital syphilis rates have increased by 1100% in less than a decade, with 113 congenital syphilis cases reported in 2020 compared to 88 in 2019, and just 10 in 2010. In response to the September 28, 2021 Board-approved motion introduced by Supervisor Hilda L. Solis titled *Addressing the STI Crisis in Los Angeles County*, the Department of Public Health (Public Health), in collaboration with the Department of Health Services (DHS), Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Alliance for Health Integration (AHI), and the Chief Executive Office's (CEO) Anti Racism, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative (AHI) provided a report back with an updated plan of action and additional recommendations

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to address the STI Crisis in Los Angeles.

Pursuant to the motion, the County provided an analysis of funding streams to address the STI response, established a framework and timeline to end the STI crisis, created a planning process to ensure coordination of efforts including the creation of an STI workgroup, are developing a publicly facing STI dashboard, and worked with community partners to provide an analysis of community capacity and infrastructure needs to respond to the crisis, including identifying communities disproportionately impacted such as African American and Latinx residents, persons experiencing homelessness, and newborns.

Regrettably, despite the yearly increases in STI rates that have now reached record levels across the United States, California, and locally, there has not been the necessary increase in revenue to combat this epidemic. Despite continued efforts on behalf of the County, STI advocacy on the federal and state levels have not had the same level of success as compared to the HIV epidemic, the opiate epidemic, or the COVID pandemic. Key funding to combat the HIV epidemic over the last three decades and the recent funding dedicated to combat COVID-19 and opioid overdoses has shown that given the proper investment, significant progress can be made in combating public health crises faced by the County.

On the federal level, the County applauds the recently released Federal STI Strategic Plan, which sets forth a vision for the nation with goals, objectives, and strategies to meaningfully prevent and control STIs in the United States. The plan sets out goals to prevent new STIs, improve the health of people by reducing adverse outcomes of STIs, accelerates progress in STI research, technology, and innovation,

reduces STI-related health disparities and health inequities, and seeks to achieve integrated, coordinated efforts to address the STI epidemic. This strategic plan represents an important step in addressing the crisis, but currently lacks a large infusion of resources to bring to scale the interventions needed to meet the objectives outlined.

On the State level, the Governor's budget includes the continuation of \$7 million for STI treatment and prevention services. And Governor Newsom signed into law SB 306, the STD Coverage and Care Act, which allows for a more comprehensive approach to addressing California's rising STI crisis. The new law expands access to testing and treatment and sets out to create a more equitable health system, requiring health plans to cover at-home tests, increasing providers who provide testing in the community, and requiring syphilis screening during both the first and third trimesters in pregnancy. However, there are further opportunities for funding and to improve compliance and tracking with respect to existing policies and tools in place to combat the spread of STIs. In 2016, the state legislature passed the California Healthy Youth Act, which has the California Department of Education partner with school districts to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect their sexual and reproductive health from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy. Although a recent study found most districts in compliance with the law, many continue to resist and enforcement of compliance remains requires clarity and improvement.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Legislative Affairs team, in collaboration with the Departments of Public Health, Health Services, and Mental Health, to send a five-signature letter to

the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra requesting the following:

- a. Support an STD Control Pilot Program for LA County that helps accelerate progress towards meeting four of the fourteen indicators and targets identified in the Federal STI Strategic Plan;
- b. Launch the Ending the STD Epidemic Initiative: A Plan for America, modeled after the recently launched Ending the HIV Epidemic Initiative and that enlists a renewed commitment from federal agencies, States, Counties and Cities, public and commercial health plans, the biotech sector and the vast network of Federally Qualified Health Centers and Community Health Centers to combat the STD crisis; and
- c. Appeal to the National Clinical Quality Association (NCQA) to adopt new incentives to improve compliance with the health plan HEDIS measure tied to annual chlamydia screening for young sexually active women ages 16 to 24. Furthermore, given the growing rates of chlamydia among young men and gonorrhea among both men and women, appeal for NCQA's adoption of new HEDIS measures to enhance screening in these areas and among these disproportionately impacted sub-populations.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Legislative Affairs team, in collaboration with the Departments of Public Health, Health Services, and Mental Health, to send a five-signature letter to Governor Gavin Newsom, California Health and Human Services Secretary Mark Ghaly, and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, requesting the following:

- a. Request the Department of Education develop and implement a systematic tracking system to monitor compliance with the 2016 California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA) and implement strategies to address non-compliance with a focus on areas with the highest numbers and rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea;
- b. Request Health and Human Services develop and implement a tracking system to monitor compliance with the recommendations outlined in the November 16, 2021 Dear Colleague letter related to the expansion of HIV and syphilis testing for pregnant patients and the newly enacted SB 306; and
- c. Request appropriate funds to support the enhancement of California's STD Control Infrastructure to fully operationalize an STD Master Plan that includes congenital syphilis elimination, a reduction of syphilis morbidity to at least 2010 levels, enhanced STD surveillance, geo-mapping and cluster detection capacity, novel STD screening, diagnosis and treatment models and expansion of home testing modeled after the COVID-19 response.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the CEO Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations division, in collaboration and consultation with the Department of Health Services Housing for Health (HFH), to advocate to the state and federal government to increase funding for street medicine interventions to ensure that people experiencing homelessness receive care for STIs.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Departments of Public Health, Health Services, and Mental Health to incorporate STI education and resources into outreach efforts of *promotoras*/community health workers.

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