

**Ad-Hoc Committee on Adult Business
DuPage County Health Department
Executive Director Karen Ayala's Testimony
March 26, 2019**

My name is Karen Ayala and I serve as the Executive Director of the DuPage County Health Department. Thank you for inviting me to speak about the very important issue of adult businesses and the resulting consequences of those businesses.

At your last meeting, you heard testimony from community leaders and experts regarding the exploitation of women at legitimate adult businesses and the psychological and economic manipulation of these women that results into their descent into illegal and highly risky behaviors. The most prominent of those behaviors, from a public health perspective, is the issue of sexually transmitted diseases, which I am here to speak about today.

In 1997, the phrase, "The Hidden Epidemic" was first used to describe Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). The phrase, coined over 20 years ago continues to describe both the lack of public awareness about STDs, as well as the absence of reliable data to determine the prevalence and impact of these preventable and treatable diseases.

Clearly, many of the issues discussed by the speakers last week contribute to this health concern increasing across all our communities. Some of the contributing biological, behavioral and social factors that perpetuate the increases can be categorized in 3 broad areas:

1. Susceptibility to STDs among young women/adolescents and the lag time from initial point of infection to conspicuous symptoms appearing can be months, if not years;
2. The interconnectedness between sexual practices, substance use/abuse and sexual abuse and violence;
3. STD's disproportionately impact disenfranchised and marginalized groups who experience additional barriers regarding access to treatment and education.

So, what data is available? CDC's 2017 Surveillance Report indicates that since 2013, chlamydia rates have increased 22 percent, gonorrhea rates by 67 percent, syphilis rates 76 percent, and congenital syphilis rates by 154 percent. Those are known and reported infections on a national level. The United

States leads industrialized nations in the incidence of STDs with nearly 20 million new infections occurring each year costing the US healthcare system \$16 billion annually according to the CDC.

Where does that leave us at a county level?

From a DuPage County level, we see an equally grim reality. In 2017, the most recent year's data that is available, we see a 241% increase in cases of chlamydia from 2000—from 731 to 2495. Among the cases diagnosed to DuPage County residents, 2/3 were identified in young (15-29 y.o.) females.

Regarding gonorrhea, there has been a 121% increase in the numbers for that same timeframe—moving from 204 to 451. This also impacts young adolescents/adults, with over 70% of cases falling in that age group, however, males are primarily impacted.

Most striking and concerning is the rise in syphilis among residents of DuPage County, demonstrating a 588% increase from 2000—when we were at 8 cases to a record breaking 59 cases in 2016. This disease is impacting a slightly older population, 20-34 years old, and is nearly exclusively male with 94% of the cases in 2017 reported in the male population.

Each of these statistics holds enormous impact to the person receiving the diagnosis. Additionally, however, the increases seen also represents significant impact to the capacity of the health department as a business. Each of these cases must be entered a data base, with significant follow-up, linkage to treatment and potential outreach to others who have been exposed for follow up and possibly treatment.

I can assure you that our funding in this area has not risen to match the increased demands, and in fact, has been reduced as the result of the State's ongoing fiscal challenges.

Another key take-away from these numbers is that they only represent "known infections" and most likely include only a portion of the infected population because the spread of these STDs includes the spread through illegal prostitution and sex trade. The long-term consequences of STDs are potentially life threatening and are costly to the infected individual, potential partners and society in general.

The DuPage County Health Department currently addresses the problem of STDs with awareness

campaigns for groups at a higher risk, including adolescents, young adults, men who have sex with men, and people who have unprotected sex. This is a national problem that requires expanded funding and resources to reach those groups as well as the people who operate in the shadows of adult businesses. Unfortunately, any reduction in services at health departments is likely to affect the at-risk populations who are already marginalized from society.

Without a doubt, the risk of HIV and other STDs is highest among persons who exchange sex for money or nonmonetary items. According to the CDC, many social and structural factors make it difficult to prevent and treat HIV among sex workers. Unfortunately, without diagnosis and treatment, long term health consequences include infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, an increased cancer risk, disability and death. Additionally, those consequences affect women and newborn babies at a much higher rate than men.

The policy decisions related to adult businesses and the connection to potential illegal activity therefore can only be addressed with proper funding and a commitment from leaders in the law enforcement community. As always, the DuPage County Health Department is willing to work on solutions with county leaders to address the issues of STD awareness and early diagnosis/treatment as needed within the county.