

Friends-

We all agree that it's time to get serious about fighting the growing health care issues surrounding Hepatitis C. That is why I am excited to share the great news that Rep. Mia Jones, who represents Jacksonville in the Florida House of Representatives, has filed legislation to ensure that getting tested and follow-up treatment becomes a regular occurrence among Floridians, especially "Baby Boomers".

Two weeks ago, I joined Rep. Jones and a number of Florida health care advocates at a press conference in Tallahassee to further the dialogue on why we it's so critical to pass this legislation.



The most recent Hepatitis C numbers noted below tell the story of why our lawmakers should support Rep. Jones legislation.

- 4 million U.S. residents are living with HCV.
- 17,000 new HCV infections occur annually in the United States.
- 15,000 deaths occur each year-now exceeding those who die of HIV.
- 300,000 Floridians are living with HCV.

Today, there are a number of effective new treatments available that can prevent serious health conditions associated with Hepatitis C such liver damage, cirrhosis, and even liver cancer.

The AIDS Institute applauds Rep. Jones for her early effort to bring awareness to Hepatitis C and the need to get tested and seek treatment. We know that getting tested can help people learn if they are infected and get them the lifesaving care and treatment they need.

Our work to combat this silent epidemic begins today. Join me in supporting Rep. Jones' legislation, [House Bill 465](#) and help us pass this important legislation this year.

Please use these links to contact your legislators and ask them to lend their support to HB465 today.

State Senate: <http://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/Find>

State

House: <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/sections/representatives/myrepresentative.aspx>

Sincerely,



Michael Ruppel
Executive Director
The AIDS Institute

P.S. Check out the Jacksonville Times-Union story on Rep. Jones' legislation and our press conference in Tallahassee.

Mia Jones' bill would require doctors to offer Hepatitis C tests to Baby Boomers

Matt Dixon | Wed, Jan 22, 2014

Tallahassee | The Centers for Disease Control issued a report in May highlighting that 75 percent of all adult patients with Hepatitis C are so-called Baby Boomers, or those who were born between 1945-1965.

As a result, state Rep. Mia Jones, D-Jacksonville, has filed legislation requiring doctors to offer those patients a Hepatitis C test during check-ups.

"When I talk to some doctors, they say that it's currently not a regular question that is asked," Jones said.

The legislation requires only that doctors offer a test, not that a test be conducted. Patients would be asked at both hospital and doctor visits.

There are exemptions in place if the patient is facing a life-threatening emergency, lacks

the ability to consent to a test, or already been offered a test.

The Centers for Disease Control is unsure why so many Baby Boomers have Hepatitis C, but says many might not even know they have the disease.

"Since people living with Hepatitis C can live for decades without symptoms, many Baby Boomers are unknowingly living with an infection they got many years ago," read the center's report.

The Florida Association of Health Plans, which represents the state's largest health insurance companies, was considered a potential opponent, but now says it may not fight the bill. There had been concern that the association could deem the legislation as creating a new mandate, which it generally opposes.

In an email sent Wednesday, Audrey Brown, the association's president and CEO, said " it doesn't appear that the bill is a mandate of coverage," but declined to comment further.

House Speaker Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, also expressed concern about the potential of a new mandate after a news conference Jones held last week to unveil the bill.

Jones has met with Weatherford, who "encouraged" her to make sure that the language did not represent a new mandate.

Jones says she has a meeting scheduled with the health insurers to discuss any concerns they have with the bill.

"It's important to remember it's not like they are required to take the test," said Jones, who is the ranking-member of the House Health and Human Services Committee.

Though there is no legislation filed in the Senate, Jones expects state Sen. Aaron Bean, a Fernandina Beach Republican, or state Sen. Arthenia Joyner, D-Tampa, to carry the bill in that chamber.