



# The AIDS Institute

*Promotes action for social change through public policy research, advocacy and education*

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## PUBLIC COMMENT

Provided by

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The AIDS Institute

Before the

Clinical Laboratory Improvement Advisory Committee

Atlanta, Georgia

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Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is James Sykes and I am representing The AIDS Institute, a national public policy organization. Thank you for considering my public comments regarding over-the-counter (OTC) home-use HIV test kits.

The AIDS Institute supports efforts by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to increase access to and availability of HIV testing. The goal of HIV testing is two-fold. First, that an individual become informed of his or her HIV status so that appropriate medical evaluation and treatment can be sought. Unlike the early domestic HIV epidemic, today improved treatment options are available to people living with HIV. In many instances HIV has become a chronic disease. Second, people who are aware of their HIV status may be less likely to transmit the virus to others. This is an important public health consideration.

President Bush, in last year's State of the Union Address, observed that of the approximately 1 million Americans infected with HIV, an estimated 250,000 are unaware they carry the virus. In his 2007 budget, the President requested \$93 million to purchase and distribute rapid test kits that will facilitate testing of approximately 3 million additional Americans. The President also called for HIV tests to become a routine part of care so all Americans will know their status. The CDC has released guidelines to physicians recommending routine voluntary HIV testing as part of regular medical care for all people between the ages of 13 and 64, and annual screening for those at high risk.

The introduction of the HIV rapid test in recent years has expanded HIV testing and increased testing access and availability. One of the advantages of the rapid test is the relative immediacy of receiving the test result. More conventional testing is hampered by relatively poor client return rates, often resulting in clients not receiving test results.

The AIDS Institute supports the concept of OTC home-use HIV testing kits. Such an approach will further increase access to and availability of HIV testing. This approach can play a role in the overall HIV domestic testing system. In particular, the approach may be appealing to individuals who resist seeing HIV testing in public health settings and private medical practice. For these individuals, use of an OTC home-use HIV test kit may be the only approach by which they become aware of their HIV status.