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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG
July 14, 2000

COMMITTEES

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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POLICY

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The Honorable Robert Zimmerman
Department of Health
802 Health and Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2020

Dear Secretary Zimmerman:

I am writing you in response to the Department of Health proposed regulation #10-156, Communicable and Noncommunicable Diseases. I would like to applaud the effort of the Department of Health for their hard work and diligence to include the Hepatitis C virus and additional diseases as reportable.

However, I would like further clarification regarding Hepatitis C. Among the many discussions that I and the Health and Human Services Committee staff have had with stakeholders and the Department, it is my understanding that it is the intent of the Department to only require reporting for acute cases of Hepatitis C. Reporting acute cases of Hepatitis C would ignore a significant portion of the Hepatitis C population, which the Center for Disease Control has estimated at nearly 216,000 in Pennsylvania. I cannot support this proposed regulation, if the Department is determined to report acute Hepatitis C while ignoring the thousands of Pennsylvanians who have chronic Hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is called the silent epidemic. We have an opportunity here to bring it to the forefront and combat this virus. I ask that you or someone from the Department of Health clarify this matter and demonstrate that acute and chronic cases will be reportable. I would also like to see within the regulations exactly what will be reportable (acute, chronic, or both) for Hepatitis C in particular.

An additional concern or question I have is the omission of HIV as a reportable disease. I know the Department is well aware of the benefits of tracking HIV cases, such as more accurate data and the ability to target resources at high-risk populations. More than a year ago, the Department conducted hearings on this issue. My conclusion of the hearings was the public recognizes the significance of reporting HIV cases, and overwhelmingly, the testifiers were in favor of unique identifier reporting. I would like a response as to why the Department has chosen not to report HIV, what type of reporting they favor, and when regulatory action may be expected.

The health and safety of Pennsylvania's citizens is crucial to the vitality of the Commonwealth. I believe the aforementioned concerns, if addressed, can ensure that each citizen will have the best opportunity to learn about, be tested and treated for and hopefully cure these deadly diseases. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future on these important matters. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis M. O'Brien".

DENNIS M. O'BRIEN, Chairman
Health and Human Services Committee

DMO'B:MPSR:mp

cc: Deborah Griffiths
✓ Mary Lou Harris