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**SASI Releases Comprehensive Report on the HIV Epidemic in the South:
Calls for Immediate and Increased Federal HIV/AIDS Resources to the South**

Durham, N.C. –The Southeastern United States is experiencing the highest rate of new HIV/AIDS infections confirms a comprehensive research report, “*HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the South Reaches Crisis Proportions in Last Decade*,” released Thursday by the Southern HIV/AIDS Strategy Initiative (SASI). The report takes a close look at nine southern states that have been particularly hard hit by the epidemic: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and (East) Texas.

“We call on the President’s Office of National AIDS Policy to coordinate an enhanced federal response and focused federal resources on the southern states,” said Carolyn McAllaster, director of the Duke AIDS Legal Project and SASI project director. “As the report highlights, meeting the goals of our National HIV/AIDS Strategy, including reducing new HIV cases, increasing access to care, and addressing health disparities, demands immediate attention to the HIV epidemic in the South. The South faces an urgent need for resources to fight the epidemic as the South has the highest rates of both new HIV diagnoses and HIV-related deaths in the country, as well as poor social determinants of health and high poverty rates.”

According to the report, commissioned by SASI and compiled by the Duke Center for Health Policy and Inequalities Research, 35 percent of new HIV infections in 2009 were in the nine targeted southern states, which contain only 22 percent of the U.S. population. The targeted states also lead the nation in new AIDS diagnoses rates. Nine of the ten states with the highest rates of death due to HIV in the country are in the South, and all nine states are among the 15 states with the highest HIV death rates. The report also identifies that 99.5 percent of people on waiting lists for AIDS Drug Assistance Programs live in the South.

SASI representatives have shared the report findings with Jeffrey Crowley, Director of the Office of National AIDS Policy, Dr. Ron Valdiserri, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, Infectious Diseases at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Christopher Bates, Executive Director of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. “We are now waiting for a response from our federal government” said Kathie Hiers, a member of SASI’s steering committee, a participant in the DC-based meetings with federal officials and Chief Executive Officer of AIDS Alabama.

SASI was launched earlier this year by the Duke AIDS Legal Project in collaboration with AIDS service providers, advocates, and people living with HIV and AIDS throughout the South. See www.southernaidsstrategy.org.

Attached report: *HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the South Reaches Crisis Proportions in Last Decade*

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