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NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH – GOVERNOR

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Gov. Blagojevich launches nation’s first Lottery ticket to benefit HIV/AIDS prevention and education

Top political figures and HIV/AIDS survivors unveil the Quality of Life Illinois Lottery game

CHICAGO – Continuing his ongoing support for HIV/AIDS prevention and education, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced the launch of the nation’s first instant Lottery ticket in the nation where 100 percent of net proceeds will support the fight against HIV/AIDS. Deputy Governor Louanner Peters joined Illinois Lottery Acting Superintendent Jodie Winnett, Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold, legislative sponsors and HIV/AIDS advocates to unveil a new “Quality of Life” Illinois Lottery game called Red Ribbon Cash. Proceeds generated from the game will fund grants to public and private entities with HIV/AIDS prevention programs in Illinois.

With more than 35,000 AIDS cases diagnosed and more than 18,000 lives taken, Illinois ranks sixth among states in the number of AIDS cases since 1981. Last year 1,906 HIV cases and 814 AIDS cases were reported in Illinois.

“With so many Illinoisans afflicted with this terrible disease, we must continue to create opportunities that raise awareness and to fund prevention and treatment options,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “The dollars raised from this ticket will provide grants for HIV/AIDS prevention and education in communities across the state, especially in the communities that have been hardest hit with the disease.”

The Quality of Life Ticket, named “Red Ribbon Cash”, will be distributed at Illinois Lottery retail locations across the state beginning February 15. Each ticket will cost \$2 and have four top prizes of \$20,000. Net revenue from the sale of Quality of Life tickets will be deposited into an interest bearing account in the State Treasury called the Quality of Life Endowment Fund.

“We are incredibly pleased to launch this new ticket where those who play the Lottery have the opportunity to play a part in improving the lives of those with HIV/AIDS throughout the state,” said Illinois Lottery Acting Superintendent Jodie Winnett.

The Illinois General Assembly will appropriate this money solely to the Illinois Department of Public Health who will award grants to public and private entities in Illinois for the purpose of funding prevention, education and treatment programs for HIV/AIDS. All grants funded by Quality of Life Ticket revenue will be reviewed and approved by a special advisory board called the Quality of Life Board.

“The latest statistics show African-American men are seven times, and African-American women are 21 times, more likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS than Caucasian men and women respectively. And the primary mode of infection among all racial/ethnic groups continues to be men having sex with men,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold. “The Quality of Life Ticket will help us continue the fight against HIV/AIDS and reduce the number of people infected across all populations in Illinois.”

“Funding for HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programs is vitally important given the increasing prevalence and devastating nature of this disease in our communities,” said State Senator Jacqueline Collins (D-Chicago). “It is my hope that we are able to get a handle on this deadly disease with the help of the Quality for Life program.”

“I was struck by the increasing numbers of African-American women who are impacted by this horrible disease,” said State Representative Karen Yarbrough (D-Chicago). “The importance of the resulting dollars raised through this mechanism will provide needed resources for prevention, intervention and treatment of HIV and AIDS, especially in African American communities.”

Illinois state legislators and HIV/AIDS advocates alike supported legislation to bring this ticket to life. Supporters included advocates from Congressman Danny Davis’s office, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Project VIDA, the Coalition for Justice and Respect, Sankofa, Inc, ROCKS Coordinating Committee, Men & Women Prison Ministries, Working for Togetherness, and the Greater Westside Development Corporation.

“Education remains our best prevention tool to eradicating HIV. It is crucial that people get tested. Knowing your status and early detection saves lives,” said U.S. Congressman Danny Davis (D-Chicago).

“Although infection with HIV is serious, people with HIV and AIDS are living longer, healthier lives today, thanks to new and effective treatments,” said State Rep. Greg Harris (D-Chicago). “It is my hope that the Red Ribbon Cash ticket will help to educate and inform people in all communities about risk reduction and prevention.”

“The 'Quality of Life' lottery ticket is an innovative resource for communities affected by HIV/AIDS,” said Ida W. Byther-Smith, Founder and Executive Director, Jo-Ray House Inc. and HIV survivor. “If half the people that play the lottery supported our education and prevention efforts, we can begin to win the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS. This isn't a lottery ticket for us; this is a ticket that gives us hope for a better future.”