

May 11, 2009

Dear Pastor Davidson,

I recently heard that the 2010 State Budget has in it the addition of co-pays for HIV/AIDS drugs under ADAAP. This could be a death sentence people with HIV who are living in poverty. In hopes that it may help to prevent this from remaining in the budget, I would like to share my story with you.

My former husband, Rubén Rivera, was HIV+. He has died since the events that I will share with you.

When we came together we were earning a joint income of \$18,000, working for the church. We also had primary care of my young grandson, but no financial support for it, due to the circumstances. Our bi-weekly gross income was about \$690. By the time we paid our basic bills of rent, PSEG, groceries, phone (which WAS a necessity due to Rubén's illness), we had between \$20 and \$30 left for two weeks. This needed to be used for gas for the car (praying that the car would not break down), plus toiletries, household items and any unexpected expenses. We were very blessed when we were able to take my grandson to McDonalds or get Chinese takeout once or twice a month.

In spite of being sick much of the time, Rubén began detailing cars part time to bring a small additional amount of money into our home.

At that time, Rubén was taking five HIV medications. If we had to pay \$6 for each of those medications, it would have meant \$30 less a month for our other essential expenses. Several things may have happened;

- We may have cut back on paying for a utility bill or rent, or
- We would have had to get more assistance from food programs that help those in poverty, IF it were available, and/ or
- Rubén would have stopped taking his medications.

Given the commitment that he had to supporting his wife and grandson, I am fairly certain that he would have stopped taking his medication. This would have meant an earlier death.

It may seem to legislators that \$30 a month is very little money to be expected to pay for medications that are needed in order to sustain life. It is not very little money when you are a person living in poverty or slightly above poverty. It means that you will have to give up something essential to basic living. This is not theoretical for me and for thousands of others. It is real.

While our situation was difficult, I know people who were making ends meet on less income and taking AIDS medications. It most certainly would have meant homelessness, hunger and/or death, perhaps all three, for them.

Please do whatever you can with other advocates to make sure that this change in ADAAP does not remain in the 2010 budget.

Thank you. God bless you.

Sincerely yours,

Lillian U.