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**Testimony to the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus of the NYC Council
Regarding Ready Access to Assistance Act (also known as REACT, Intro.
359)**

Good afternoon. My name is Laverne Holley and I am a welfare recipient at the NYC HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA), a division of the Human Resources Administration (HRA). I am also a board member of the NYC AIDS Housing Network, which is a membership organization comprised and led by low-income people living with HIV/AIDS. My testimony is also reflective of the feelings of our over 3,800 members.

I am honored to have been given this opportunity to testify before this caucus, which is always so focused on the concerns of poor New Yorkers, particularly those of us living with HIV/AIDS. I am passionate about the passage of the Ready Access to Assistance Act (REACT), Intro. 359.

As a client of HASA, I can tell you that I spend a considerable amount of time waiting in the welfare center. Even though I am stably housed and permanently federally disabled, I am required to go to the welfare center fairly frequently to correct budgeting errors and to re-certify my case. While HASA has taken steps to improve their service delivery in the centers, they are still a maze of misinformation which can lead to devastating errors that for those of us living with AIDS, can be life threatening.

I can't count the number of times that if I was not trained to know my rights, or if I didn't discuss issues with advocates from nonprofit organizations, I would have had my budget illegally reduced and suffered severe hardship.

But budget miscalculations are a small, but common, issue that HASA workers frequently commit. From 1999-2002, under the Giuliani administration, thousands of homeless people living with AIDS were illegally denied emergency housing. This practice was only stopped, because organizers and advocates stood in front of welfare centers and informed people of their right, through NY Local Law 49, to emergency housing. Had those advocates not been there, thousands more would have been left homeless. Had those advocates been allowed inside, thousands more would have been protected from the harsh streets.

REACT would make the jobs of welfare workers easier. In fact, workers frequently call or stop by the NYCAHN office to check on their latest procedures. REACT would help us clients struggling to survive the welfare system and survive our fight against AIDS.

I urge this caucus to do everything you can to support REACT. While this is off topic, I would also like to urge you to do everything in your power to reverse the State imposed rent increases for formerly homeless New Yorkers living with AIDS in supportive housing.

Thank you for your time and commitment to social justice.