TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.2349/S.1404
AN ACT RELATIVE TO HIV PREVENTION ACCESS FOR YOUNG ADULTS
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH
April 29, 2021

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) wishes to be recorded in support of the House bill 2349 and Senate bill 1404, An Act Relative to HIV Prevention Access for Young Adults. The MMS is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to give them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible. HIV/AIDS prevention has long been a public health priority for the Medical Society. Specifically, the Medical Society strongly encourages effective prevention strategies, including the use of condoms, pre-exposure prophylaxis of high-risk populations, and sex education programs, for reducing the risk of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Prevention services and educational mechanisms are critical tools to use toward curbing rates of new HIV infections, especially now as the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced added barriers to HIV testing, prevention and care—particularly among vulnerable populations. HIV case counts continue to rise, with alarming clusters of infections identified in multiple locations throughout the Commonwealth. It is notable that Massachusetts lacks mandated comprehensive sexual health education, and there are no required educational standards for schools that do choose to teach sex education.

Public health data show that young people are disproportionately affected by rising rates in sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Young people, specifically LGBTQ youth, are disproportionately impacted by HIV, with LGBTQ youth of color facing the highest disparities in infection; 21% of new HIV diagnoses are people aged 13 to 24 years old, and they are disproportionately Black and Latino.
While there have been some favorable developments in preventing the spread of HIV, the infection rate among young people continues to rise, and the uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as preventive treatment has been low. PrEP is a prescription medication that, when taken daily, is a highly effective HIV prevention tool; it reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99%. In May of 2018, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Truvada as PrEP for adolescents, creating an opportunity to increase access to HIV preventive treatment for a population with a disproportionately high risk of infection.

Massachusetts General Laws currently permit minors to consent to healthcare for many sensitive services, including testing for, and treatment of, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, but not for prevention services such as PrEP and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), creating an unreasonable barrier to care. The continued development and approval of these prevention services requires a change in the statute allowing minors to consent to certain health care. This legislation would do just that by adding prevention services to the health care that minors may consent to without parental permission.

Facilitating access to PrEP is critical in helping to decrease the rate of new HIV infections among young people. For these reasons, the Medical Society respectfully urges a favorable report on H.2349/S.1404.