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Southern AIDS Living Quilt
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Southern AIDS Living Quilt Raises Awareness In Washington, D.C.

*Electronic AIDS Quilt Unites Leaders
of Virginia, Maryland and D.C. AIDS Offices*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Thursday, December 4, 2008 – Nationally, Washington, D.C. ranks first in AIDS cases. Of people living with AIDS in D.C., 82 percent are African American. In an effort to increase awareness of this crisis in D.C. and the South, today's Living Quilt roundtable at the George Washington University brought together the leaders of the Virginia, Maryland and District of Columbia AIDS offices to discuss the challenges associated with fighting HIV/AIDS in America.

The Southern AIDS Living Quilt, www.livingquilt.org, collects and shares video and audio stories from women on the front lines of the fight against the spread of HIV and AIDS. The Living Quilt highlights the need for routine testing, early diagnosis, and increased access to care for those living with HIV/AIDS in the South.

"On World AIDS Day, much of the world was focused on the epidemic in the developing world. We are here today because little attention has been paid to how the epidemic is growing in our own backyards—especially among women. The Living Quilt makes one thing very clear, the status quo must change," said Dr. Bambi Gaddist, Southern AIDS Coalition Board Member and Executive Director of the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council. "It is also clear that there is a desire to hear these stories. Thousands of people across the country have watched these videos in the few weeks since we launched in New Orleans."

The event was co-hosted by the Southern AIDS Coalition, The Women's Collective and Metro TeenAIDS. Representing these groups were board members of the Southern AIDS Coalition, including Dr. Bambi Gaddist, Heather Hauck, Director of the Maryland AIDS Administration, and Kathy Hafford, Director of the Division of Disease Prevention of the Virginia Department of Health. Dr. Shannon Hader, Director of the HIV/AIDS Administration of the Washington, D.C. Department of Health, Fushena Cruickshank, Metro TeenAIDS Leadership Development Coordinator, and other local Living Quilt participants were also panelists.

"Young people, particularly young women, need to hear these stories to know they're not alone and that there is life after testing positive for HIV," said Fushena Cruickshank of Metro TeenAIDS in D.C. "The online Quilt is an effective way to reach this younger audience," continued Cruickshank.

The true power of the Living Quilt project is in the stories it shares and the inspiration it brings to others. While some are telling their stories for the first time, others have embraced the importance of communicating the changing face of HIV/AIDS. HIV infections could be reduced by 30 percent per year if all HIV infected persons knew of their infection and adopted behavioral changes to limit the spread of the disease.

Visitors can also upload stories of their own, becoming part of the Quilt through their own unique narrative. The Living Quilt site also provides valuable information and resources on HIV and AIDS, including where to find testing resources across the United States.

About the Southern AIDS Coalition

The Southern AIDS Coalition was formed in 2001 as a membership organization of government representatives, corporations, and community advocates. This unique partnership is borne from the burgeoning numbers of people whose new infection rates are much higher than the rest of the U.S. population. SAC highlights that federal funds do not meet the needs of those living with HIV in the South and are not equally distributed across the country. SAC works to provide southern citizens an opportunity for adequate HIV/AIDS prevention information, treatment, and health care. SAC is a federally recognized 501(c)3.