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HIV/AIDS patients beg legislators not to cut funding

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By Jordan Sandler - [bio](#) | [email](#)

COLUMBIA, SC (WIS) - The South Carolina House voted Thursday to cut all HIV/AIDS funding from the budget, a funding issue that could affect thousands of South Carolinians.

The South Carolina HIV/AIDS Care Crisis Task Force reports there are more than 14,000 people living in the state who have tested positive for HIV or AIDS. About 3,000 people rely on government funds for medications.

For Brian Morgan, two pills carry a miracle.

"Life," he added, shaking pills out of a bottle.

"This helps me stay alive, this medication," said Ali Shabazz.

Morgan and Shabazz are two South Carolinians living with HIV. They both rely on ADAP, the AIDS Drug Assistance Program, to pay for their lifesaving meds.

"My insurance doesn't pick up my HIV needs," Morgan said. "This bottle right here without ADAP would cost me \$750 a month."

"These are a necessity, not a luxury," said Shabazz.

With the legislature threatening to cut HIV/AIDS funding from the state budget, their lifeline is at risk.

"It's unfair, it's like committing murder because you know people are going to die," said Shabazz.

Dr. Bambi Gaddist of the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Care Crisis Task Force says when state funding began in 2006, more than 600 people were on a waiting list for medicine. Four of those people died.

"The funding from the legislature ensured that we could eliminate that wait list," said Gaddist. "To get these 600+ people that were in waiting to get medication off of that list and to ensure they got well, got back to work."

Gaddist says if funding is cut, there will be a new line of people who can't get medication.

"In 2006 we made some progress, we cannot stand to go back," said Gaddist.

Gaddist says in addition to saving a life, the medications actually make the virus less likely to spread to another person.

"More medication means less transmission of the virus, fewer people spreading it from