



# Illinois Coalition of Community Blood Centers

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## **BLACK CAUCUS TEAMS WITH STATE'S BLOOD CENTERS TO INCREASE MINORITY DONATIONS**

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Springfield, IL – As Chairman of the Illinois General Assembly's Black Caucus, Rep. Marlow Colvin (D-Chicago) explained the demand for blood donations in the African American community and called for minorities across the state to become regular blood donors.

“One in 500 African Americans born each year has sickle cell anemia. They often need very frequent blood transfusions closely matched for blood types that only black donors can efficiently provide. African Americans donate less than 1% of the nation's blood supply, making it difficult to find the blood to save the lives and ease the pain of sickle cell patients,” said Linda Gerber, President of the Illinois Coalition of Community Blood Centers and CEO of the Rock River Valley Community Blood Center.

“Receiving a well-matched blood transfusion can mean the difference between life, disability and death for some patients because 30 percent of sickle cell patients develop antibodies that destroy transfused blood cells,” said Dr. Wesley Robinson-McNeese, associate professor of internal medicine at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield. “These antibodies can make it impossible to find compatible

blood outside of the African American community so the benefit of blood transfusions in sickle cell patients would improve if more African Americans donate blood regularly.”

McNeese explained that sickle cell disease causes severe pain when abnormally shaped red blood cells clog the circulation. Serious complications include stroke, and damage to the joints, kidneys, liver, and spleen. No cure exists, but transfusions can be life saving because they replenish the supply of healthy red cells replacing the abnormal cells. Both painful medical crises and organ damage are prevented.

“It is important that African Americans understand that by donating blood they are saving lives in their community. As community leaders, it is our responsibility to get the message out that minority donations need to be increased,” said Rep. Colvin.

"There is a dire need for minorities, more specifically African Americans, to become regular blood donors in the State of Illinois. Chronic diseases such as sickle cell anemia affect African Americans and other minority U.S. citizens disproportionately to Caucasian citizens. I strongly encourage more African Americans in Illinois to start regularly donating blood today," said Senator Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago).

All community blood centers perform sickle cell testing for blood units going to patients with the disease. LifeSource will begin offering free screening for the sickle cell trait for interested donors this month. Other coalition members are looking into a similar program. “Education about blood donation, its benefits and overall awareness is critical for African American blood donors, as well as all donors,” said Roxanne Tata, LifeSource Vice President and Chief Operating Officer.

The Illinois Coalition of Community Blood Centers is statewide association made up of not-for-profit blood centers whose mission is to increase awareness of the importance of volunteer blood donation through public education and advocacy. To learn more go to [www.illinoisbloodcenters.org](http://www.illinoisbloodcenters.org).

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