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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HAIR SALONS OFFER HIV TESTS AND HEALTH EDUCATION
Partnership Between Westchester County, Hair Salons and Project WAVE Introduced

County Executive Andy Spano today introduced a new initiative that brings rapid HIV tests to hair salons throughout Westchester that serve communities of color.

“I commend these forward-thinking hair salon owners for demonstrating how much they care about their clients and their community by teaming up to offer HIV testing and other health screenings to their clients,” said County Executive Andy Spano. “Hair salon owners and Westchester County both want residents to not only look their best, but also to feel their best and stay healthy. Everyone should get tested, so that if they do have HIV, they can get treatment early to prolong their well-being and keep their partners safe.”

The tests today are being given by staff from Westchester Medical Center. The HIV tests are a unique element in a new partnership forged between hair salons and barber shops, the Westchester County Department of Health and Project WAVE Westchester, a coalition of agencies that offer free HIV tests in community settings. Through their combined efforts, clients at a dozen salons and barber shops can learn more about HIV infection, as well as other chronic diseases that disproportionately affect communities of color, such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Free condoms are available in the salons and HIV prevention education is provided to clients. Rapid HIV tests will be offered on a mobile van outside of six salons during the upcoming months.

“We know people tend to come back again and again to their hair stylist, so it makes sense to bring health education and testing to hair salons, in addition to other non-traditional places the county’s Department of Health goes, such as parks, apartment complexes, churches, gyms, community centers and supermarket parking lots,” Spano said.

The initiative was introduced today at Habib’s, a New Rochelle salon on Main Street. Along with Habib’s, salons and barber shops in Yonkers, Mount Vernon, White Plains and Ossining will participate, with free rapid HIV tests, glucose and blood pressure screenings provided by these Project WAVE members: Open Door Family Medical Center,

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Westchester Medical Center, Children’s Village and Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center.

“HIV and AIDS are important public health issues here in Westchester County, since outside of New York City, Westchester County has the most people living with HIV or AIDS in New York State,” said Westchester County Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua Lipsman. “People who are diagnosed early are more likely to have a better outcome than those diagnosed late. Unfortunately, in Westchester, 39.5 percent of people are diagnosed late in the course of their HIV infection and develop AIDS within a year. We know that when people learn they have HIV, they take steps to lead healthier lives, so it’s important for Westchester residents to get tested, whether they are gay or straight, have one partner or many.”

Communities of color are disproportionately affected by this epidemic. Half of the people who have been diagnosed with HIV or AIDS in Westchester are African-American, who comprise 14% of the County’s population. About 27% of the HIV and AIDS cases are among Hispanics, who represent 18% of the County’s population. Increasingly, women are being affected by HIV and AIDS, with women of color most likely to be infected through heterosexual transmission. Among people living with HIV in Westchester as of December 2006 (the most recent statistics available), 47.3 percent were women, while 52.7 percent were men. Although most AIDS cases are among men (61.7 percent in 2006), the percentage of AIDS cases among women has more than doubled from 1987 to 2004, to 38.3 percent.

The CDC estimates that of the more than one million adults and adolescents living with HIV in the US at the end of 2006, one in five, or 21 percent, do not know they have HIV. In 2006, there were 3,173 people in Westchester living with HIV or AIDS.