

For Immediate Release
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Valerie C. Beckley
Executive Director
Sickle Cell Disease Association of Illinois

CHICAGO, IL—Valerie C. Beckley, 58, executive director of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Illinois, died at home on Saturday, January 10 after a long bout with ovarian cancer.

Since 2002, Mrs. Beckley has headed the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Illinois (SCDAI) a 37-year-old community-based agency dedicated to the education of patients, family members and the community about sickle cell disease and sickle cell trait (SCD and SCT). For the last six years, Ms. Beckley, acting as an advocate for improved healthcare and patient services for SCD patients, has been directly responsible for many first and historic achievements in the State of Illinois and nationally as they apply to sickle cell disease. In 2002, she was responsible for SCDAI being one of 17 agencies nationally to be awarded funding for the Newborn Screening Program. This program creates a process to contact parents of newborns testing positive for SCD and SCT and provide education and counseling in Illinois. Over the course of six years, SCDAI has provided services and education to over 6,000 children and families affected by SCD and SCT.

In 2006 she was instrumental in securing funding from the state of Illinois to provide outreach education to families and medical professionals throughout the State of Illinois, to reach areas where gaps in services and healthcare exist. Because of the significance in advancing the treatment and education of sickle cell disease statewide, she was also instrumental in being awarded a four-year grant along with the Christian Community Health Center for more than \$1.2 million, to form the Illinois Sickle Cell Action Network. This network is one of only four networks in the United States that was given an award to provide comprehensive statewide healthcare services for sickle cell patients.

Mrs. Beckley's accomplishments have included being the Executive Director of Health Smart Partners, a minority employee-owned company that was recognized nationwide for developing quality projects which provided access to healthcare, health benefits and educational services to over one million Medicaid individuals throughout Cook County. Under her leadership, approximately 50,000 Medicaid individuals were enrolled into the State of Illinois' contracted health care programs and over 200 public aid recipients were recruited, trained and employed by Health Smart Partners.

Ms. Beckley has focused her dedication and leadership as an advocate for community-based programs for over 26 years. Her broad range of experiences has provided health care education and services to over 15,000 individuals and families nationally and internationally. She held a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from Roosevelt University in Chicago and a master's degree in Social Work from Loyola University in Chicago.

Ms. Beckley has served as the Chicago liaison for the National Asthma and Allergy Foundation, and former chair of the 7th Congressional District Welfare and Poverty Task Force, and was an Executive Board Member of the Midwest Jamaican Consulate. Recognized for her strong community service leadership ability, she was recently elected by the country of Jamaica to serve as the first woman on the Jamaican Diaspora Advisory Board for the Midwest-West region of the United States (representing over 15 states).

She is survived by her mother and father, Mae and Larry Mitchell; husband, Jerome; daughter Kamaria; siblings, Melody Ingram, Marilyn Hebron and Donald Kendall and host of relatives and friends. Her son, Shakir, preceded her in death.

Her funeral arrangements, handled by A.R. Leak & Sons, will take place at Carey Tercentenary A.M.E. Church, 1448 S. Homan Avenue, on Saturday, January 17 from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. for visitation and 11:00 to Noon for the funeral. Her interment will be at 2 p.m. at Cedar Park Cemetery, 12540 S. Halsted Street, Calumet Park, Illinois.