

# Does a City's "Party Town" Reputation Cause Its High HIV Rate?

A county health director stated as much, but after public criticism, she apologized.

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Charlotte, North Carolina, is a "party town," and that's why it has one of the highest HIV rates in the country. So explained Gibbie Harris, the new Mecklenburg County health director, while speaking at a County Board of Commissioners meeting.

The comments were [reported last week in The Charlotte Observer](#) and were immediately met with criticism. Claiming that her remarks fueled outdated stereotypes about people living with the virus, AIDS activists and gay rights groups [called for an apology](#). Within two days of the original story, Harris [issued a statement](#):

"My recent use of the term 'party town' was never intended to stigmatize anyone or to cause harm to people living with HIV. Words matter. I apologize to those I offended.

There are many things that influence HIV and we have much work to do to adequately and appropriately prevent and treat HIV in Mecklenburg County. I hope that we, as a community, can focus on action going forward."

Harris's original comment was made at a board meeting during which officials asked why the city had such high HIV rates. Harris had mentioned drug use and demographics as part of the problem, The Charlotte Observer reports, but she also blamed tourism. "In cities like Charlotte," she said, "which draws a lot of people in, it can be a party town. It can be a place where people come in, enjoy themselves for the weekend and then leave but leave stuff behind."

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