



October 9, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Thank you for your commitment to developing and implementing a National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) for the United States. We are among the more than 600 organizations and over 2,450 individuals who signed the Call to Action for a NHAS and who, for the past several years, have been advocating for a more coordinated, accountable and outcomes-oriented approach to HIV/AIDS in the United States through a NHAS.

As organizations and individuals committed to an evidence-based, effective HIV prevention effort, we also understand the urgency of removing the ban on federal funds for syringe exchange programs (SEPs). As you know, numerous federally funded studies have found that SEPs reduce HIV and hepatitis C incidence without increasing drug use or crime. Yet lack of resources makes it impossible for SEPs around the country to meet communities' needs for the essential prevention, treatment and other services these programs provide. The challenge is particularly acute as states across the country grapple with fiscal shortfalls by reducing state funding for vital HIV/AIDS prevention programming, including SEPs.

Earlier this year, you reaffirmed your support for removing the ban on federal funding for SEPs and indicated you want to eliminate the ban as part of the NHAS process. **We are writing to let you know that efforts to remove the SEPs ban cannot wait until completion of your Administration's NHAS.**

Since White House staff made supportive statements about elimination of the ban in May 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives, with the leadership of Appropriations Chairman David Obey, voted to remove the ban as part of the FY2010 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill. Now advocates for evidence-based health policy are counting on the House and Senate to conference a final version of the legislation that eliminates the ban and removes all restrictions (such as the "1,000 foot rule") on the decision-making authority of local and state officials.

Mr. President, we need your voice to realize this historic opportunity. We urge you to contact Senator Tom Harkin, Chair of the Senate's Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, and other Senate leaders and convey your strong support for removing the ban as well as all restrictions on local authority in use of federal funds for SEPs.

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As a proponent of evidence-based health policy, removal of the ban is fully consistent with your leadership on health issues generally. Overturning this ban represents a crucial first step in implementing a new, national approach determined to obtain better results from our HIV programming. And if the ban is not lifted in this budget cycle it will limit the ability of your NHAS to address the objective of reducing HIV incidence.

The House and Senate may finalize the Labor-HHS-Education bill within weeks, and it is quite possible we will not have this opportunity again next year. We therefore urge you to follow through now on your support for removing the ban on federal funding for SEPs.

Thank you again for your leadership on HIV/AIDS and public health. We look forward to working with you to implement an effective NHAS and enacting evidence-based policies that can prevent disease and deliver life-saving care to all Americans. Please send your response to our letter to Chris Collins at amfAR, 1150 17th Street, NW, Suite 406, Washington, DC 20036 (email chris.collins@amfar.org; phone 202.331.8600).

Sincerely,

The Coordinating Committee of the Campaign for a National AIDS Strategy:
Randy Allgaier, CAEAR Coalition
Judy Auerbach, San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Chris Collins, amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research
Julie Davids, Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP)
Rebecca Haag, AIDS Action
Marjorie Hill, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)
Naina Khanna, WORLD and U.S. Positive Women's Network
David Ernesto Munar, AIDS Foundation of Chicago
Pernessa Seele, The Balm In Gilead
Dana Van Gorder, Project Inform
Phill Wilson, Black AIDS Institute
A. Toni Young, Community Education Group

cc: Melody Barnes, Director, Domestic Policy Council
Jeff Crowley, Director, Office of National AIDS Policy
Rahm Emanuel, Chief of Staff

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And the undersigned organizations:

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Aid Atlanta Inc
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Action Committee of MA
AIDS Services of Austin
AIDS Task Force of the Upper Ohio Valley
AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
BIENESTAR - Southern California
CAB Health and Recovery Services
Caritas House, Inc.
Eastern Maine AIDS Network
HIV ACCESS
Maine AIDS Alliance
Paterson Counseling Center, Inc
Pediatric AIDS Chicago Prevention Initiative
Pillsbury United Communities
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Team Todd
The AIDS Institute
The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Inc
The Friends of AIDS Foundation
Thursday's Child of Long Island
To Cure Is To Care Outreach, Inc.
U.S. Positive Women's Network (PWN)
Well of Hope Community Development Corporation, In

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