Jussie Smollett Raises $40,000 in Fight Against HIV

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Jussie Smollett wants people to know that he's not just an actor; he's also an HIV activist. According to a recent press release announcement, the entertainer raised $40,000 for the Black AIDS Institute, the nation's only HIV/AIDS think tank dedicated to Black people.

When the institute recently found itself facing budget issues, Smollett decided to donate $20,000 as a challenge gift. He pledged the money to inspire other donors to contribute to the cause. The result? He met his goal. The donations helped close the institute's budget gap and launched a testing campaign to develop a monthly support group for nearly 40 Black men.

Smollett's ties to the organization date back 20 years. When he was 15, he began volunteering with the nonprofit. Smollett credits his activism to his mother. In 2015, he and his sister, actress Jurnee Smollett-Bell, were both inducted into the community group's Heroes in the Struggle Hall of Fame for their commitment and tireless work to end the AIDS epidemic. Nowadays, Smollet serves on its board of directors.

"Jussie talks the talk, walks the walk and puts his money where his mouth and heart are," said Phill Wilson, president and CEO of the Black AIDS Institute. "We have many celebrities who support our work, and I am eternally grateful for their voices and time. But money fuels change. It takes dollars to test people for HIV. It takes donations to link people to care. It takes resources to resist the draconian and devastating attacks Donald Trump and his administration are waging on the HIV/AIDS community. If the President and the Republican-led Congress have their way, we are going to lose any opportunity to end the AIDS epidemic. Jussie understands that."

In September, Smollett is set to chair the 2017 Heroes in the Struggle Gala for the Black AIDS Institute, which will recognize his Empire costar and onscreen mother, Taraji P. Henson.

"As a member of the Black AIDS Institute's board and past Heroes in the Struggle honoree, I'm so excited about this year's event," Smollett said. "I can tell you, this year's awards presentation is going to be a huge departure from our past shows. Number one: All of the 2017 inductees are going to be women. I know from my personal experience, women have been so important to this fight."

Click here to read about how Smollett and Henson teamed up with the MAC AIDS Fund to help

combat HIV and AIDS.

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