Senators Call on FDA to Lift Gay Blood Donation Ban

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John Kerry (D–Mass), Kirsten Gillibrand (D–N.Y.) and 16 other U.S. senators are urging the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to lift its 25-year-old ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men (MSM), *The Advocate* reports. The ban was put in place to protect the blood supply from HIV/AIDS, which was reported primarily among MSM at the beginning of the epidemic.

In a letter to FDA commissioner Margaret Hamburg, the senators call the ban medically unnecessary. They encourage the FDA to review its blood donation screening questionnaire so that it will evaluate risk behavior in potential donors as opposed to sexual orientation. These recommendations are in line with a recent report issued last week by New York City–based AIDS service organization Gay Men's Health Crisis, which also called on the FDA to lift the ban.

"The safety, availability and integrity of our nation's blood supply are vital," the senators wrote. "For these reasons, we agree with the American Red Cross, America's Blood Centers, AABB and others that the time has come for the FDA to modify the lifetime deferral for MSM to be consistent with sensible health and safety policy and with FDA deferral guidelines for high-risk heterosexual behavior. We request that you initiate a review of the lifetime deferral requirement for men who have sex with men wishing to donate blood and that you reexamine the deferral criteria for all blood donors to ensure all high-risk behaviors are appropriately addressed."

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