UPDATE: Celebrate the Life of Cornelius Baker, Esteemed and Beloved HIV Advocate

Also a champion of Black gay men, Cornelius Baker died November 9. Here's how you can honor his work.

November 29, 2024 By Trent Straube

UPDATE NOVEMBER 29: As POZ reported earlier this month, Cornelius Baker, a longtime HIV strategist and advocate for Black gay men, died November 9. (See the original article below.) Details about a memorial are now available, according to a Facebook post by Jirair Ratevosian:

The Celebration of and Thanksgiving for the Life of A. Cornelius Baker will take place on December 13, 2024, at 10:00 AM at the Washington National Cathedral. All are welcome to attend in person or join virtually using link below. Please note that the National Cathedral does not accept flowers; instead, you can donate to Us Helping Us or Broadway Cares in honor of A. Cornelius Baker.

Us Helping Us, People Into Living Inc.

https://www.ushelpingus.org/innovationfund

Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS

https://donate.broadwaycares.org/give/377544/...

Washington National Cathedral virtual participation:

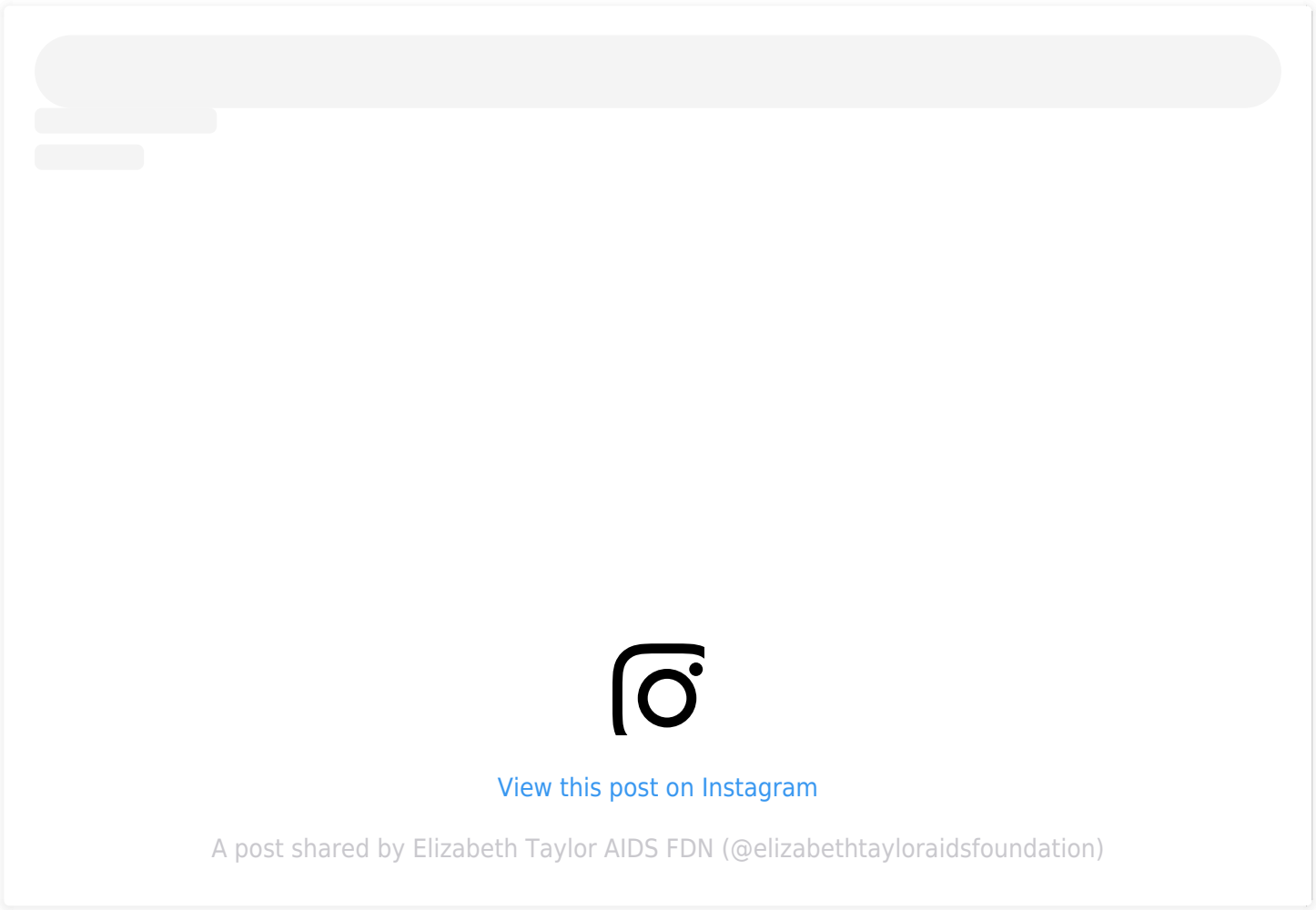
https://www.youtube.com/live/qnhA6RUPL4E

Below is the November 12 POZ article:

Cornelius Baker, a beloved HIV policy expert and longtime activist for Black gay men, died unexpectedly of natural causes at his home on November 9, reports the Washington Blade. His career encompassed a who's who of federal and national organizations, including the President's

Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the National Institutes of Health, the Whitman-Walker Clinic, the Rollins School of Public Health, the National Association of People with AIDS and the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation (ETAF).

News of his sudden passing prompted an outpouring of memories and tributes online.



“A. Cornelius Baker stood with our Founder, Elizabeth Taylor, at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS movement and throughout her legacy,” wrote ETAF. “The ETAF Officers and staff team join his family, friends and community as we mourn his loss together. We find comfort in knowing that his spirit, along with Elizabeth’s, will continue to guide and inspire us and the entire HIV/AIDS movement in our ongoing work.”

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by NMAC (@nmachiv)

“Cornelius was a fierce fighter and educator whose influence was felt worldwide,” wrote Harold Phillips, the deputy director of programs at NMAC. “He used his lived experience as a black gay man living with HIV and his knowledge to make the world a better place for people with HIV across the world. His work reflected faith in action. He saw our humanity and the potential in many of us. Cornelius pushed us to be better and act on behalf of those often cast aside. He also spent many nights making us laugh and smile while developing strategy, policy and actions to influence everything from the HIV research to Ryan White Reauthorization, to PEPFAR implementation and reauthorization. He met with federal officials and community members. He marched and testified before the city council to the halls of Congress.

“A friend put it best this weekend, ‘Cornelius was like a river that ran through many lands.’ Just like a river, he helped shape so many of us and left us changed. We are grateful and will continue his legacy and the work. Rest In Power.”

POZ featured Baker in its pages several times, most recently in the 2021 POZ 100, which honored Black advocates. He was also a member of the POZ Advisory Board. You can read his POZ 100 writeup here.

In 2013, while working as a senior communications adviser at FHI 360 (a family planning and health nonprofit), Baker appeared in the documentary The AIDS Epidemic. In the YouTube excerpt above, he spoke about the need for scientific knowledge and political leadership in the early days of HIV.

A New York native, Baker earned a bachelor’s degree from the Rochester Institute of Technology’s Eisenhower College in Rochester, New York. He later made Washington, DC, his home. He served

in federal offices across many administrations and in 1999 served as the executive director of what is now Whitman-Walker Health.

“Cornelius Baker led Whitman-Walker through challenging times, strengthening the infrastructure and organizational culture but always with keen attention to the people we were serving,” current Whitman-Walker CEO Naseema Shafi told the Washington Blade. “He brought that commitment to community, to Whitman-Walker, and he continued it throughout all of his years of service.”

“Cornelius filled a room with energy and enthusiasm. His deep thinking, eloquence, strategic approach and commitment to collaboration invariably steered challenging situations towards creative solutions,” wrote the Robert Carr Fund, a network promoting human rights and access to HIV services. “He was instrumental in the creation of the Robert Carr Fund [RCF] in 2012 and helped to ensure that PEPFAR remained the largest donor to RCF for each successive round of funding.

“Cornelius was a beacon of hope for inadequately served populations around the world and a stalwart advocate for the rights and health of marginalized communities most affected by HIV. He recognized the intersectionality of race, gender and sexual identity as critical issues impacting HIV risk and that people living with HIV need to be at the center of our responses to the pandemic.

“We will miss his intelligence and wit, his dedication, passion and hard work, his smile, his kindness and his humanity. We have lost a true hero and warrior for equality and justice. May our memory of Cornelius and the life of public service he led inspire us to work ever harder to end AIDS, discrimination and oppression and to leave no one behind.”

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/rip-cornelius-baker-longtime-hiv-strategist-advocate-black-gay-men