Clinton Meets With 20 AIDS Activists; Sanders Reschedules

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Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton kept her promise and sat down with 20 AIDS activists from across the country in a meeting at her campaign headquarters in Brooklyn, according to a press release from Housing Works, which fights the dual epidemics of homelessness and HIV.

“We do have the tools to end this epidemic once and for all,” Clinton said in her opening remarks, according to a Reuters video clip. “But we need to rededicate ourselves to fighting HIV and AIDS and leaving no one behind. That means continuing to increase research and expanding the use of medications like PrEP [pre-exposure prophylaxis as HIV prevention]. It means capping out-of-pocket expenses and drug costs and building on President Obama’s National HIV/AIDS Strategy to increase the number of people on HIV treatment worldwide. And let’s reform outdated, stigmatizing HIV criminalization laws.”

During the hour-long meeting, Clinton discussed the national and global strategies to end AIDS, saying that the issue would be a priority in her administration. Housing Works noted that “Clinton was very knowledgeable on the issue, acknowledging how HIV has dropped from national discourse since the height of the crisis, and she had a strong awareness of which communities are most at risk for HIV.”

Activist Peter Staley, whom Clinton thanked for bringing national attention to the epidemic back in the ’80s, posted this about Clinton on Facebook:

Housing Works described the meeting as “a productive start of what committed to be an ongoing conversation. HIV/AIDS advocates look forward to working on these issues with Secretary Clinton, and the coalition is hoping to meet with both Senator Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump.”

Clinton’s democratic rival, Bernie Sanders, canceled a similar meeting with advocates earlier this month but has rescheduled it for May 25 in California.

The 20 attendees at the meeting represent a broader coalition of 70 AIDS activists. According to Housing Works, meeting attendees included:

- Guillermo Chacón, president, Latino Commission on AIDS; founder, Hispanic Health Network
- Cecilia Chung, senior strategist, Transgender Law Center
- Dazon Dixon Diallo, DHL MPH, president and founder, SisterLove Inc.
- Kenyon Farrow, U.S. and global health policy director, Treatment Action Group (TAG)
- C. Virginia Fields, MSW, president/CEO, National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS Inc. (NBLCA)
- Ramon Gardenhire, vice president of policy and advocacy, AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC)
- Noël Gordon Jr., senior program specialist, HIV prevention and health equity, Human Rights Campaign
- Kathie M. Hiers, CEO, AIDS Alabama
- Ernest Hopkins, director of legislative affairs, San Francisco AIDS Foundation
- Vanessa Johnson, JD, member, United States People Living with HIV Caucus
- Charles King, president/CEO and founder, Housing Works
- Kelsey Louie, MSW, MBA, CEO, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)
- Hilary McQuie, director of U.S. policy and grassroots mobilization, Health GAP
- Morolake "Rolake" Odetoyinbo, executive director, Positive Action for Treatment Access Nigeria
- Michael Emanuel Rajner, BSW, HIV/AIDS activist and social worker
- Eric Sawyer, founding member, ACT UP New York
- Peter Staley, AIDS activist
- Melanie Thompson, MD, principal investigator, AIDS Research Consortium of Atlanta; executive editor, Strategy to End AIDS in Fulton County
- Robert "Bobby" Tolbert, board member, VOCAL-NY
- Phill Wilson, president and CEO, Black AIDS Institute

During Nancy Reagan's funeral earlier this year, Clinton mistakenly praised the Reagans for starting a dialogue about AIDS. The error angered many in the HIV community, and Clinton was quick to apologize. For more, read the POZ article "Hillary Clinton Said WHAT About Nancy Reagan and AIDS!?!!!"

UPDATE: Housing Works has posted the minutes and summary of the meeting with Clinton. you can read it here.

UPDATE II: The coalition of AIDS activists met with Bernie Sanders on May 25. Read the POZ article "A Surprise Twist After Sanders Meets With 20 AIDS Activists" and its followup "Bernie Sanders vs. Peter Staley."

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