AIDS Advocates Call Upon Bernie Sanders to Make Ending the Epidemic Priority

March 19, 2016 By Peter Staley

A similar letter was sent to Hillary Clinton earlier this week.

March 18, 2016

Senator Bernie Sanders
Bernie 2016
PO Box 905
Burlington, VT 05402

Dear Senator Sanders,

We are longtime HIV/AIDS survivors, family members, friends, and partners of loved ones lost to the AIDS epidemic over the past 35 years, and advocates for the 1.2 million Americans still living with HIV and those around the world still facing the AIDS crisis.* We write to you in the sincere hope that we can work together to facilitate an urgently needed public discussion of a plan to end the United States HIV epidemic by the year 2025.

Over the past several days, HIV/AIDS entered the public conversation in the context of the Reagans' dark legacy. But these painful memories also create a hopeful opportunity for real action. In order to realize a viable vision for our future together, we must remember our shared history with accuracy, and we must be able to acknowledge the true heroes and successful strategies amassed in the fight against HIV, both past and present.

You have publicly announced a commitment to creating an AIDS- and HIV-free generation, addressing the high costs of drugs, the need for universal healthcare, and the need for comprehensive health services for those who
are at risk, and we are grateful to have you as an ally and an advocate on these issues.

We now have the tools to stop HIV transmission and AIDS deaths, and some of our most affected urban centers like New York City and San Francisco are making dramatic progress towards realistic goals to end their epidemics as early as 2020. Yet our national HIV response has stagnated, with no reduction in the past decade in the 50,000 avoidable new HIV infections each year. Indeed, some regions of our country are losing ground in the fight, with tragically increasing rates of new infections and premature mortality.

As a result of the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid expansion in some states, and new HIV prevention tools, ending the national HIV/AIDS epidemic is truly within our reach. Indeed, a rapidly growing community driven national coalition, comprised of organizations including Housing Works, Treatment Action Group, GMHC, Latino Commission on AIDS, Human Rights Campaign, ACT UP New York, Southern AIDS Coalition, National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, NMAC (formerly known as National Minority AIDS Council), San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and AIDS Foundation of Chicago, among others, is already initiating a campaign to end the AIDS epidemic in the United States by the year 2025. To pursue and achieve that goal, we must look first to the efforts and successes of those who have exhibited leadership and vision in pursuing this objective and call upon others to follow that lead.

In June 2014, Governor Andrew Cuomo showed tremendous courage by committing New York State to be the first jurisdiction in the nation and around the globe to end AIDS as an epidemic and announcing a threepoint plan to achieve that objective by 2020. In 2015, he appointed a Task Force to develop a Blueprint to carry out that plan. That Ending the Epidemic (ETE) Blueprint now serves as the foundation for budget and policy priorities for reaching the 2020 goal, and its implementation is underway.

Governor Cuomo’s bold commitment sparked national and global interest and action. Since 2014, other U.S. jurisdictions, including Washington State, Colorado, and San Francisco, have seized the opportunity to end their local HIV/AIDS epidemics; and similar efforts are underway in Atlanta, Texas, and Massachusetts. By following New York’s lead by pushing for expanded HIV testing, early antiretroviral treatment and essential services for people with HIV, as well as access to targeted HIV prevention tools such as PrEP for people at high risk, it is now possible for U.S. localities to launch viable plans to end their HIV/AIDS epidemics.

UNAIDS’ ambitious call to end the AIDS epidemic worldwide by the year 2030, too, is a goal that is within our reach, but it’s also true that if a well-resourced United States cannot end our epidemic, then we will most certainly lose that global fight.

In his final State of the Union address, President Obama asserted that “we’re on track to end the scourge of HIV/AIDS. That’s within our grasp.” To make that a reality, however, the nation urgently needs a more aggressive federal strategy and framework to support such local plans and a deeper federal commitment to end the national HIV/AIDS epidemic.

We ask for you to prioritize the establishment of strategies to end the U.S. and global HIV/AIDS epidemics as a key component of your campaign platform. To that end, we propose the following:

* the appointment of an HIV advisor for your campaign;

* a meeting with you and HIV community leadership at your earliest convenience to discuss creating a viable plan to end the national epidemic, one that honors the many Americans we have lost to AIDS, and that recognizes, engages, respects, and supports the many Americans with HIV and those who will become HIV-positive unless we take action—at the rate of 40,000 to 50,000 new annual infections if current national trends persist;

* your announcement of a commitment to end AIDS as an epidemic in the United States by 2025. This commitment would include convening a Community Advisory Panel of community and public health experts and government officials; working with the panel to develop a detailed strategy for a national plan to end the AIDS epidemic by 2025; and developing financial commitments using increased funding to established federal programs; and

* support ending the global AIDS pandemic by increasing funding to the global PEPFAR program by at least $2 billion per year by 2020 to double the number of people on treatment and provide additional funding for an initiative to address the social and economic drivers of HIV, poverty, and inequality.

The good news is that there has never been a more hopeful time or a better window of opportunity in the fight to end AIDS. To achieve that dream, we need a comprehensive national strategy that utilizes and leverages every resource to finally bring this scourge to an end. Creating and implementing that strategy calls for vision, fortitude, and tenacity from you and other leaders. We strongly urge you to join with us NOW to seize this opportunity.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and we look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Jose Abrigo, Staff Attorney, LGBTQ/HIV Advocacy Project, Queens Legal Services
ACRIA
ACT UP New York
African Services Committee
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Alabama
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
William Scott Daly, Greater New York Policy Advisory Partnership
Albany Damien Center

Ali Forney Center
Amida Care
Apicha Community Health Center
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Bailey House
John Barry, LMSW, Executive Director, Southern Tier AIDS Program
The Black AIDS Institute
BOOM! HealthRebecca Botting

Rebecca Botting
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Sergio Farfan, Louisiana Latino Health Coalition for HIV/AIDS
Ingrid Floyd, Executive Director, Iris House
Miasha Forbes, Human Rights Activist and Founder, Just for Us: Gender Diversity Project
GMHC
Health GAP
Health People
Hetrick-Martin Institute
Hispanic Health Network
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Marsha Jones, the Afiya Center
Howard Josepher, LCSW, President & CEO, Exponents
Jacquelyn Kilmer, CEO, Harlem United
Lambda Independent Democrats of Brooklyn
Latino Commission on AIDS
Latinos in the Deep South
LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York
Alan Timothy Lunceford-Stevens, End AIDS Now
Demetrius McCord, Acting Executive Director, Harm Reduction Coalition
Brian McIndoe, CEO & President, William F. Ryan Community Health Network
Matthew McMorrow, former Director of Government Affairs, Empire State Pride Agenda
David Ernesto Munar, CEO, Howard Brown Health
William Murphy, Executive Director, Ryan / Chelsea-Clinton Community Health Center

National Black Justice Coalition
National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS

NMAC (formerly known as the National Minority AIDS Council)
OASIS-Latino LGBTS Wellness Center
Chuck Peterson, Executive Director, Clare Housing, Minneapolis, MN
Michael Emanuel Rajner, Wilton Manors, FL
Kyle Rapinon, Esq., Director of Survival and Self-Determination, Sylvia Rivera Law Project
Elana Redfield, Attorney and LGBTQI Activist
Dr. Margaret S. Reneau, Director of Programs, National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS
Equality Florida and the Equality Florida Institute
Eric Sawyer, Founding Member—ACT UP, Co-Founder Housing Works, Inc. & Health GAP, Inc.
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Social Services
Treatment Action Group
Trillium Health/Rochester
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