



My Friend Harold

Harold Phillips was an amazing director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy.

January 24, 2024 By [Paul Kawata](#)

Harold Phillips was an amazing director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy, and his departure is a great loss for community. I falsely take credit for his success because Harold's first national HIV job was at NMAC. Before that, Harold worked in North Carolina establishing their HOPWA program. The truth is that he really cut his teeth at HRSA/HAB. His experience working on the Ryan White Care Act gave him the knowledge and understanding of how the federal government works. That skill set served him well in the White House. He was more than an ambassador for the administration, he worked and moved real policy, fighting inside the Domestic Policy Council and with the Office of Management and Budget.

My job sometimes requires critical reviews of the administration's response to the epidemic. I pushed Harold harder than any of his predecessors and I've been around since the first AIDS Czar, Kristine Gebbie. Harold could go toe to toe with me in these struggles. I saw firsthand that he was not just our advocate in the White House, he was also a lifeline to community. As a Black gay man living with HIV, he was the living embodiment that your HIV status does not matter. What is the White House if not symbols of the best of us?

NMAC is concerned about his replacement. As the White House searches for a new director, NMAC (National Minority AIDS Council) sent a letter to Neera Tanden, Director of the Domestic Policy Council, asking her to consider these factors when making this important decision. The ideal candidate has worked with community to end the HIV epidemic in America. He/She/They ideally are living with HIV or have lived experience in the communities shouldering the greatest burden of HIV. For NMAC, race matters. People of color are the largest number of people living with HIV and the largest number of new HIV cases. We hope the White House continues its commitment to communities of color, especially this important year.

There are multiple external candidates that we could recommend, but given the need to move quickly, the lack of funding, and the time left in this President's term, the most likely solution is to transfer an existing federal employee to the White House. Whoever is chosen, NMAC will work with them and hold them accountable for the administration's response. With less than a year left in this term, there is no time to build a community census.

Our movement is under attack, particularly the communities who shoulder the greatest burden of HIV. We need an AIDS Czar who can not only give a good speech, but also move legislation,

particularly HIV appropriations. Someone who will fight for justice and equality for all the communities shouldering the greatest burden of the virus. Harold will be missed. He is an example of the right person at the right time for the challenge of a lifetime.

Yours in the struggle,

Paul Kawata

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