An Open Letter to DaBaby

Advocates request a private meeting to discuss the facts about HIV and a long-term opportunity for him to share the education to his fans.

August 4, 2021 By Undetectable = Untransmittable

We, the undersigned, represent organizations leading the fight to prevent HIV and provide care and treatment for people living with HIV, especially Black LGBTQ people across the Southern United States.

We heard your inaccurate and harmful comments at Rolling Loud and have read your Instagram apology. However, at a time when HIV continues to disproportionately impact Black Americans and queer and transgender people of color, a dialogue is critical. We must address the miseducation about HIV, expressed in your comments, and the impact it has on various communities.

2021 marks the 40th year of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the greatest obstacles in our work to end HIV are the compounded stigmas attached to anti-Blackness, living with HIV, misogyny, and anti-LGBTQ attitudes and stereotypes, all of which are fueled by misinformation. It's fear and stigma that keep people, particularly Black Americans, from accessing HIV prevention or care that White Americans have historically and continue to access more easily. We believe that you now have an opportunity to not just move past this unfortunate incident, but to use your platform and celebrity to heal not harm.

We believe that anyone can be an HIV advocate by amplifying: how there is medication (PrEP) that can prevent people from getting HIV with one pill a day, how routine treatment stops the virus from being passed on by people living with the HIV, how people receiving HIV care can survive and thrive while living with it, and how open and empathetic conversations eliminate stigma. You can be a powerful and influential voice, especially across your home base in the South, where the Black community's needs are notoriously under-represented across every public spectrum. We encourage you to share this information with your fans and followers, and become an agent of truth and change.

Music artists have historically led the way to lift up understanding of HIV and accelerated LGBTQ acceptance. Several artists and platforms have spoken up against you. While we appreciate their stand, we also invite them to take action and to do their part to end HIV by supporting organizations like ours serving people who are Black, LGBTQ and/or living with HIV.

As mentioned in your latest apology, education is important. We agree. GLAAD and Gilead Science's 2020 State of HIV Stigma Study found that 90% of Americans believe "there is stigma

around HIV," that "people are quick to judge those with HIV," and "people make assumptions when someone is tested for HIV." There were a significant number of people (40%) who did not know that HIV can be treated. Nearly 60% wrongfully believe it is "important to be careful around people living with HIV to avoid catching it."

Here are the facts:

- People living with HIV today, when on effective treatment, lead long and healthy lives and cannot sexually transmit HIV. Treatment can suppress the virus to a point where it is no longer detected in a person's body. When it is undetected, it is untransmittable, the key message of the U=U campaign.
- Approximately 1.2 million people in the U.S. have HIV. 13% of them don't know it, reinforcing the need for HIV testing and to end stigma around HIV testing.
- People most vulnerable to HIV are those who have limited access to transportation, housing, healthcare, and social support. We should focus on advocating for resources in our community rather than stigmatizing women and LGBTQ people.
- Black Americans account for more HIV diagnoses (43%), people living with HIV (42%), and the most deaths among people with HIV (44%) than any other racial and ethnic group in the U.S.
- The CDC states that the U.S. South experiences the greatest rates of HIV and lags behind in providing quality HIV prevention services and care. According to AIDSVu, a program from Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health and the Center for AIDS Research at Emory University, 31,864 people are living with HIV in North Carolina, where you were raised.
- Medications like PrEP protect people who do not have HIV from contracting it. The CDC states that PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99% when taken as prescribed.

As leaders of organizations directly serving Black, LGBTQ, and HIV+ communities, we invite you to a private, off-the-record, virtual discussion with us. You stated you now understand how and why your comments were damaging. An open conversation holds the potential for you to now create meaningful impact by transforming from an adversary to an advocate.

Sincerely,
Dr. Samira Ali, Director, SUSTAIN Center at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work
Dr. Davin D. Clemons, CoFounder and Chief Financial Officer, Relationship Unleashed
Gwendolyn D. Clemons, CoFounder and Executive Director, Relationship Unleashed

Kia Colbert, Program Director, EnCORE, Emory Centers for Public Health Training and Technical Assistance
Raniyah Copeland, President and CEO, Black AIDS Institute
Ian L. Haddock, Founder and Executive Director, The Normal Anomaly Initiative
Rev. Dr. Shonda Jones, Wake Forest Faith Coordinating Center
Arianna Lint, CEO & President, Arianna's Center
Dr. Allison Mathews, Wake Forest University Faith Coordinating Center
Warren A. O'Meara-Dates, Founder/Chief Executive Officer, The 6:52 Project Foundation, Inc.
Deondre B. Moore, U.S. Partnerships & Community Engagement Manager, Prevention Access Campaign
Neena Smith-Bankhead, Center Director, EnCORE, Emory Centers for Public Health Training and Technical Assistance
Bec Sokha Keo (they/them), Public Impact Scholar, SUSTAIN Center at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work
DaShawn Usher, Associate Director, Communities of Color, GLAAD
Dafina Ward, Executive Director, Southern AIDS Coalition

Supporting Organizations:
Karl Schmid, Founder, PlusLife

Please email press@glaad.org to add your organization as a supporting organization.

Click here for the POZ newsfeed item about DaBaby's comments.

This open letter was originally posted at GLAAD.org.

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