Reflections of a Seasoned AIDSWatch Advocate

Because this year's HIV lobbying event had to be virtual, people with mobility issues were able to participate, writes Wanda Brendle-Moss.

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I believe I attended my first AIDSWatch in 2013. To many of the HIV advocates there, I was totally unknown, so my excitement, anticipation and desire to rush around meeting people that I'd been conversing with via social media was uncharted waters. Looking back on it, I think they were uncertain of me because, despite being in my 50s, I was a new kid on the block!

Wanda Brendle-Moss

Fast forward to the months and weeks ahead of AIDSWatch 2020 and again I was uncertain—not because I was going to be the unknown entity at this year's conference or because of troubled political waters, but because of the appearance of a different type of virus. As it got closer to conference time, a new and even uglier beast—one that was taking the lives of people in other countries—finally arrived in the United States. It was the beast we all now know as COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

AIDSWatch takes place each year in Washington, DC. During the conference, HIV advocates from across the nation network with each other, participate in training sessions and lobby their Congress members on Capitol Hill.

This year, AIDS United and the partners that host AIDSWatch had a decision to make: They could cancel the conference entirely or they find a way to make it happen without endangering any lives. This advocate was immensely grateful when I got email stating AIDSWatch was to be a

virtual event! After hearing the news, I immediately emailed AIDS United staffers and asked if I could register. They told me, “Yes, you can!” So I did.

A few days after I registered, it was brought to my attention that AIDS United had made an unprecedented decision: This Virtual AIDSWatch was to be free for anyone who wanted to cyber-attend! I was so excited I shared via Twitter and Facebook…every day!

Many people may not realize that I am no longer physically able to rip and run like my fellow advocates remember being normal for me. Extreme asthma with a side of aging with HIV has caused me to acknowledge my limitations.

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