



In Response to Proposed HIV Funding Cuts, Over 600 Advocates Rally for AIDSWatch 2025

AIDSWatch participants meet with congressional leaders about national-level HIV policies. Here are four highlights from the event.

April 14, 2025 By [AIDS United](#)

Washington, D.C. – April 14, 2025 – More than 630 advocates from 38 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia gathered in Washington, D.C., for AIDSWatch 2025 — the longest running and largest constituent-led HIV federal advocacy convening in the nation. Advocates rallied on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol before convening over 271 meetings with congressional leaders about national-level policies that will help end the HIV epidemic. Speakers led the advocates through morning remarks from AIDS United CEO-elect Carl Baloney, Jr., Barb Cardell, Program Director of Positive Women’s Network, actor and The Elizabeth Taylor HIV/AIDS Foundation ambassador Daniel Franzese, and Jesse Milan, Jr., President & CEO of AIDS United.

During the rally, Milan spoke to the advocates sharing, “We have seen attacks on many of the lifesaving programs that our community needs to survive and thrive. In a time where we should be accelerating our progress, we are facing funding threats to programs like the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, the CDC’s Division of HIV Prevention, Medicaid, and PEPFAR, just to name a few. The fight is here and the fight is right now. Our community is not going back down without a fight.”

Since its inception 32 years ago, AIDSWatch has evolved into the nation’s most impactful HIV advocacy event, bringing together diverse voices to amplify community-led policy priorities. The theme of this year’s event — “Preserving our Health and PrEParing for the Future!” — underscores the urgent need to protect existing HIV services while expanding access to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and other prevention tools. It signals our commitment to health equity and ensuring that all voices — especially those of people living with and affected by HIV — are heard in the fight to end the epidemic. Over the course of three days, AIDSWatch participants engaged in over 20 constituent-led workshops and institutes geared towards preparing advocates to share their stories and become familiar with the policy priorities.

Key highlights of AIDSWatch 2025 included:

- The AIDSWatch Welcome Reception, where the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus honored

Jesse Milan, Jr., the current President/CEO of AIDS United, as this year's recipient of the Caucus' Lifetime Achievement Award, and presented Dr. Daniel Driffin and Shekinah Rose with their annual Persistent Advocate Awards.

- The Opening Plenary featured opening remarks from Carl Baloney Jr., CEO-elect of AIDS United, and AIDSWatch Planning Partners members, Carmel Shachar, J.D., M.P.H., Faculty Director of the Health Law and Policy Clinic at the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation, and Venita Ray, co-chair of the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus, following a panel discussion on the HIV community's response to attacks moderated by Jesse Milan, Jr., President/CEO of AIDS United and featuring keynote speakers, including: Tori Cooper, from the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus, Dafina Ward, from the Southern AIDS Coalition, and Omar Martínez González, from AIDS Foundation Chicago.
- The AIDSWatch Congressional Awards Reception, hosted by Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman, recognized advocates' exemplary leadership via the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus' Castro Bojorquez Positive Leadership Awards, which were presented to longtime HIV advocates Kamaria Laffrey and Antoinette Jones. Representative Sarah McBride (DE-AL) delivered inspiring remarks to advocates during the reception. In addition, Representative Mark Pocan (WI-2), Representative Robin Kelly (IL-02), and Representative Delia Ramirez (IL-03) were presented with the Congressional Leadership Awards.
- The AIDSWatch Rally and Hill Day, where over 630 advocates rallied on Capitol Hill before engaging in over 271 meetings with congressional lawmakers on critical HIV policy priorities.

AIDSWatch is presented by AIDS United, in partnership with the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus (the HIV Caucus) and the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation, with major support from Merck Pharmaceuticals and The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation and other benefactors provided for the event.

For more information on AIDSWatch 2025 and to access resources and policy priorities, please visit www.aidsunited.org/aidswatch.

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