

February 12, 2009

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20006

Dear President Obama,

We salute your commitment to federal funding of syringe exchange, which you recently reaffirmed in the debut of the revamped White House website.

We now ask you to call on Congress to strike the language banning federal funding for syringe exchange from the FY 2009 Appropriations Omnibus bill. We also ask that your budget specifically call on Congress to allow funding in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill to be used for syringe exchange when you submit the FY 2010 budget to Congress. Taking action now to remove the ban in the FY '09 Omnibus is the most expeditious route to allow cities and states the needed flexibility to tailor existing federal funding streams to fight deadly infectious diseases based on the needs and conditions of local communities.

In recent years, the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill includes a provision stating that “no funds appropriated in this Act shall be used to carry out any program of distributing sterile needles or syringes for the hypodermic injection of any illegal drug” (Title V, Sec. 505). Congress needs a clear directive from the White House to strike this language and allow local flexibility in the design and implementation of programs to prevent HIV and other infectious diseases.

Injection drug use remains a major driver of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States, and the leading cause of new hepatitis C infections. Abundant research, endorsed by the findings of eight federally commissioned reviews, has conclusively demonstrated that syringe exchange is effective in reducing the transmission of HIV without increasing drug use. Syringe exchange programs currently operate in 36 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, but can only meet a fraction of the need due to the federal funding ban. Existing syringe exchange programs provide a growing range of critical health services, education, and support to vulnerable groups otherwise denied access to timely health care. Moreover, such programs serve as a crucial link for countless substance users to addiction treatment and recovery programs through counseling and case management. The ban on federal funds has had international repercussions as well, unnecessarily hampering our ability to assist countries experiencing explosive HIV/AIDS epidemics driven by injection drug use.

In 2007, Congress took an initial step by striking the Appropriations provision that had restricted the District of Columbia from using its own funds for syringe exchange. This action has resulted in new and expanded programs better poised to halt the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic in the nation's capital. Strong leadership now can extend this promising sign of progress to the rest of the country.

We've learned a lot about syringe exchange since the federal funding ban was originally enacted. It's time for the federal government to use every tool at its disposal to arrest the further spread of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

Signed,

A Brave New Day	Jackson, MS
Access Works! Harm Reduction Services	Minneapolis, MN
ACoRN (A Community Resource Network)	Lebanon, NH
ActionAIDS	Philadelphia, PA
ACT UP New York	New York, NY
ACT UP Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA
ADAP Fund	Chicago, IL
Advocates for Recovery through Medicine (ARM)	Washington, DC
Advocates for Youth	Washington, DC
African Services Committee	New York, NY
After Hours Project	Brooklyn, NY
AID Gwinnett	Duluth, GA
AIDS Action	Washington, DC
AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts	Boston, MA
AIDS Action in Mississippi	Jackson, MS
AIDS Alabama	Birmingham, AL
AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth and Families	Washington, DC
AIDS Alliance for Faith and Health (AAFH)	Atlanta, GA
AIDS Center of Queens County (ACQC)	Queens, NY
AIDS Community Alliance	Harrisburg, PA
AIDS Community Research Consortium (ACRC)	Redwood City, CA
AIDS Community Research Initiative of America	New York, NY
AIDS Foundation of Chicago	Chicago, IL
AIDS Fund of South Central Pennsylvania	Harrisburg, PA
AIDS Healthcare Foundation	Los Angeles, CA
AIDS LIFE Campaign	Hartford, CA
AIDS Partnership Michigan	Detroit, MI
AIDS Prevention ACTION Network (APAN)	Redwood City, CA
AIDS Project Los Angeles	Los Angeles, CA
AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin	Milwaukee, WI
AIDS Resource Center Ohio	Dayton, OH
AIDS Rochester	Rochester, NY

AIDS Services of Austin	Austin, TX
AIDS Support Network/SLO Hep C Project	San Luis Obispo, CA
AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland	Cleveland, OH
AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition	New York, NY
AIDS Treatment Data Network	New York, NY
AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition (AVAC)	New York, NY
Albany Damien Center, Inc.	Albany, NY
ALERT Health, Inc.	North Miami, FL
Allies Linked for the Prevention of HIV & AIDS (a.l.p.h.a.)	Boise, ID
American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM)	Washington, DC
American Medical Student Association	Reston, VA
amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research	New York, NY
Aniz, Inc.	Atlanta, GA
Any Positive Change	Lake County, CA
Artists for a New South Africa	Los Angeles, CA
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum	San Francisco, CA
Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center	San Francisco, CA
Asian Liver Center at Stanford University	Palo Alto, CA
Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team	Los Angeles, CA
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care	Akron, OH
Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition	Atlanta, GA
Austin Harm Reduction Coalition	Austin, TX
Bakersfield Needle Exchange	Bakersfield, CA
BIENESTAR	Los Angeles, CA
Blue Mountain Heart to Heart	Walla Walla, WA
Bronx AIDS Services	Bronx, NY
CAB Health & Recovery Services	Lynn, MA
CAEAR Coalition	Washington, DC
California Hepatitis Alliance (CalHEP)	Sacramento, CA
Cambridge Cares about AIDS	Cambridge, MA
Caring Ambassadors Program, Inc.	Vancouver, WA
Cascade AIDS Project	Portland, OR
Catholic Charities AIDS Services	Albany, NY
Catholics for Choice	Washington, DC
Center for Health Justice	West Hollywood, CA
Center for HIV Law and Policy	New York, NY
Center for Independent Living of South Florida, Inc.	Miami, FL
Center for the Study of Hepatitis C, Weill Cornell Medical College	New York, NY
Central City AIDS Network	Macon, GA
CHAIN - Community HIV/Hepatitis Advocates of Iowa Network	Des Moines, IA
Chicago Recovery Alliance	Chicago, IL
CitiWide Harm Reduction	Bronx, NY
Coalición de Coaliciones Pro Personas Sin Hogar, Inc.	San Juan, PR
Common Ground - The Westside HIV Community Center	Santa Monica, CA

Community Health and Safety Collaborative	Fresno, CA
Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP)	New York, NY
Conard House, Inc.	Conard, CA
Connecticut AIDS Resource Coalition	New Haven, CT
Connecticut Harm Reduction Coalition	New Haven, CT
DC Fights Back	Washington, DC
Desert AIDS Project	Palm Springs, CA
Desiree Alliance	Henderson, NV
Disabilities Rights Advocacy Group, Inc. (D.R.A.G.)	Philadelphia, PA
Eastern Maine AIDS Network	Bangor, ME
Education for Healthy Choices	Sacramento, CA
FAIR Foundation	Palm Desert, CA
Family Health Centers of San Diego	San Diego, CA
Family Services Network of New York	Brooklyn, NY
Foundation for Integrative AIDS Research (FIAR)	Brooklyn, NY
Fresno Needle Exchange Program	Fresno, CA
FROST'D	New York, NY
GALAEI	Philadelphia, PA
Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)	New York, NY
Gender Education & Advocacy, Inc.	Atlanta, GA
Gentle Spirit Christian Church of Atlanta	Atlanta, GA
George Washington University Chapter of the Student Global AIDS Campaign	Washington, DC
Georgia Rural Urban Summit	Atlanta, GA
Global Action for Children	Washington, DC
Global AIDS Alliance	Washington, DC
HAMS Harm Reduction Network	New York, NY
Harlem United	New York, NY
Harm Reduction Center of Southern Oregon	Roseburg, OR
Harm Reduction Coalition	New York, NY
Harm Reduction Coalition of Long Island	Lindenhurst, NY
Harm Reduction Consulting Services, Inc.	Port Chester, NY
Harm Reduction Institute	Indianapolis, IN
Harm Reduction Psychotherapy and Training Associates	New York, NY
Harm Reduction Services	Sacramento, CA
Harvard Global Health and AIDS Coalition	Cambridge, MA
H.E.A.L.S of the South	Tallahassee, FL
Health and Human Rights Caucus (HHRC) at the Boston University School of Public Health	Boston, MA
Health GAP	New York, NY
Health People	Bronx, NY
HealthReach Harm Reduction & The Next Step Needle Exchange	Augusta, ME
Hep C Advocate Network, Inc. (HepCAN)	Longview, TX
Hep C Connection	Denver, CO
Hepatitis C Association	Scotch Plains, NJ

Hepatitis C Support Project/HCV Advocate	San Francisco, CA
Hepatitis Education Project	Seattle, WA
Hepatitis Support Association	Houston, TX
HIPS	Washington, DC
HIV/AIDS Alliance of Michigan	Detroit, MI
HIV/AIDS Resource Center	Ypsilanti, MI
HIV/AIDS Services, Inc.	Grand Rapids, MI
HIV/AIDS Services for African Americans in Alaska	Anchorage, AK
HIV Alliance	Eugene, OR
HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of NY	New York, NY
HIV Law Project	New York, NY
HIV Medical Association	Arlington, VA
HIVictorious, Inc.	Madison, WI
hopeFound	Jamaica Plain, MA
H.O.P.E. Testing Clinic	Tulsa, OK
Housing Works	New York, NY
Howard Brown Health Center	Chicago, IL
Human Rights Watch	New York, NY
Hyacinth AIDS Foundation	New Brunswick, NJ
International Network of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD)	
International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (ICW)	
International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)	
International Women's Health Coalition	New York, NY
Intersect Worldwide	New York, NY
Joplin Gay Lesbian Family & Corporate Center	Joplin, MO
Justice Now	Oakland, CA
Justice Resource Institute	Boston, MA
Lambda Legal	New York, NY
Lansing Area AIDS Network	Lansing, MI
Latino Commission on AIDS	New York, NY
Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP)	Medford, MA
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center	New York, NY
Life Foundation of Honolulu	Honolulu, HI
Lifeline Treatment Center	Oakland, CA
Lifelong AIDS Alliance	Seattle, WA
LiverHope	Minnetonka, MN
Long Island Minority AIDS Coalition	Lindenhurst, NY
Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center	Los Angeles, CA
Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center	New York, NY
Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship	New York, NY
Marin Treatment Center, Inc.	San Rafael, CA
Massachusetts Hepatitis Patient Empowerment Project	Turner Falls, MA
Mendocino County AIDS Network (MCAVN)	Ukiah, CA
Michigan Positive Action Coalition (MI-POZ)	Detroit, MI
Minnesota AIDS Project	Minneapolis, MN

Mission Neighborhood Resource Center	San Francisco, CA
Missouri Hepatitis C Alliance	Columbia, MO
Modesto Syringe Exchange Program	Modesto, CA
Nashville CARES	Nashville, TN
National African American Drug Policy Coalition, Inc.	Washington, DC
National AIDS Fund	Washington, DC
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors	Washington, DC
National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA)	Washington, DC
National Coalition of STD Directors	Washington, DC
National Council of Jewish Women	New York, NY
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund	Washington, DC
National Hepatitis C Advocacy Council	
National Minority AIDS Council	Washington, DC
National Stonewall Democrats	Washington, DC
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable	Washington, DC
NC Syringe Access	Greensboro, NC
Needle Exchange Emergency Distribution (NEED)	Berkley, CA
Needle Exchange Program of Ashville	Ashville, NC
New Jersey Stonewall Democrats	Piscataway, NJ
New Mexico Hepatitis C Alliance	Albuquerque, NM
New York City AIDS Housing Network	Brooklyn, NY
New York Harm Reduction Educators (NYHRE)	Bronx, NY
North American Syringe Exchange Network	Tacoma, WA
North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition	Jamestown, NC
November Coalition	Colville, WA
Nyaya Health	New Haven, CT
Ohio AIDS Coalition	Cleveland, OH
Open Door Community Health Centers Needle Exchange Program	Arcata, CA
Open Society Policy Center	Washington, DC
Partners In Health	Boston, MA
Partnership Project	Portland, OR
Pediatric AIDS Chicago Prevention Initiative	Chicago, IL
Pharmacists Planning Service, Inc.	San Rafael, CA
Philadelphia FIGHT	Philadelphia, PA
Physicians for Human Rights	Cambridge, MA
Piedmont HIV Health Care Consortium	Durham, NC
Pittsburg Community Council, Inc. (PPSCC)	Pittsburg, CA
Point Defiance AIDS Projects	Tacoma, WA
Point of Change, Inc.	Detroit, MI
Points-of-Distribution	Oakland, CA
Population Services International (PSI)	Washington, DC
Portland Overdose Prevention Project	Portland, OR
Positive Health Clinic	Pittsburgh, PA
Positive Health Project	New York, NY
Praxis Housing Initiatives, Inc.	New York, NY

Prax(us)	Denver, CO
Prevention Point Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA
Prevention Point Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh, PA
Project Inform	San Francisco, CA
Project SAFE	Philadelphia, PA
Promesa Systems Inc.	Bronx, NY
Proyecto Amor Que Sana, Inc.	Ponce, PR
Proyecto Sol Filadelfia	Philadelphia, PA
Real Cost of Prisons Project	Northampton, MA
RECONSIDER	Syracuse, NY
Recovery 2000	Chicago, IL
Redwood AIDS Information Network & Services (RAINS)	Redway, CA
Rose Associates	Emeryville, CA
Ruth M. Rothstein CORE Center	Chicago, IL
Safe Horizon	New York, NY
Safe Recovery/Howard Center	Burlington, VT
San Antonio AIDS Foundation	San Antonio, TX
San Antonio Needle Exchange (SANE)	San Antonio, TX
San Francisco AIDS Foundation	San Francisco, CA
SisterLove	Atlanta, GA
SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective	Atlanta, GA
SMART Recovery	Mentor, OH
South Side Help Center	Chicago, IL
Southern Tier AIDS Program	Johnson City, NY
St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction	Bronx, NY
START at Westminster	Washington, DC
Status C Unknown	Medford, NY
STOP AIDS Project	San Francisco, CA
StoptheDrugWar.org/Drug Reform Coordination Network	Washington, DC
Student Global AIDS Campaign (SGAC)	Washington, DC
Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP)	Washington, DC
SWOP Las Vegas	Las Vegas, NV
The AIDS Institute	Washington, DC
The Drop-In Center	Denver, CO
The Women's Center, Montefiore Medical Center	Bronx, NY
TII CANN - Title II Community AIDS National Network	Washington, DC
Topeka AIDS Project	Topeka, KS
Transgender Equality Rights Initiatives (TERI)	Fort Lauderdale, FL
Transgender Health Project	Minneapolis, MN
Treatment Access Expansion Project	Washington, DC
Treatment Action Group	New York, NY
UCHAPS: Urban Coalition for HIV/AIDS Prevention Services	Washington, DC
UHAP/Upstate New York Hepatitis Awareness Project	Delhi, NY
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations	Washington, DC
University Coalitions for Global Health	Reston, VA
University of California Cooperative Extension	Alameda, CA

Urban League of Rhode Island	Rhode Island, RI
U.S. Positive Women's Network	Oakland, CA
Vermont Committee on AIDS, Resources, and Education (CARES)	Burlington, VT
Vermont People with AIDS Coalition	Montpelier, VT
Village Care of New York	New York, NY
Voices of Community Advocates & Leaders (VOCAL)	Brooklyn, NY
Washington Heights CORNER Project	New York, NY
Wellness AIDS Services, Inc.	Flint, MI
Who's Positive	State College, PA
WhoSoEver	Traverse City, MI
Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases (WORLD)	Oakland, CA
Women With a Vision, Inc.	New Orleans, LA
Women's Collective	Washington, DC