



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
MENTAL HYGIENE**
Thomas Farley, MD, MPH
Commissioner

December 20, 2010

Matthew Lesieur
Community Co-Chair
HIV Health & Human Services Planning Council of New York
40 Worth Street, Room 1519
New York, N.Y. 10013

Dear Mr. Lesieur:

Thank you for writing to share your concerns about the Health Department's HIV prevention message, *It's Never Just HIV*. I know you share my determination, and Mayor Bloomberg's, to fight this epidemic by all available means.

As you know, there has been great success in providing effective treatment for people with HIV. Once a death sentence, HIV infection is now a manageable disease. Nonetheless, HIV infection is still very serious, and it is far better for people to never acquire the infection in the first place than to become infected and receive antiviral treatment for life. The Health Department is thus using many approaches to prevent New Yorkers from becoming infected with HIV.

The success of HIV treatment has led to some complacency about the infection, particularly among young men who have sex with men. As a result, over the last eight years we have seen a 50% increase in the number of men in this group newly-reported with HIV. This resurgence of the epidemic in this group is unacceptable.

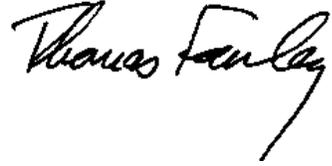
The current campaign was designed to prevent infections by raising concern and combating complacency. It focuses on serious health effects (bone loss, dementia and anal cancer) that affect people with HIV even under treatment. This campaign does not assign blame or promote stigma. It conveys factual information in a very direct manner, with the expectation that people at risk will hear the facts and act on them.

The *Never Just HIV* campaign is a product of experience and research. The Health Department has used targeted, hard-hitting advertising in its anti-smoking campaigns since 2005, with remarkable success. In developing this prevention campaign, the Health Department consulted medical experts and community leaders, including HIV-positive individuals and men who identify as gay. The agency's staff also interviewed men from the target population and tested different approaches in focus groups drawn from the community. None of the men who viewed rough cuts of *It's Never Just HIV* said they thought it would stigmatize them.

The message of *Never Just HIV* is blunt and unpleasant. It is also critically important, and we have no intention of withdrawing it. I hope you will reconsider your view of this campaign. If you cannot endorse it, please understand that it was undertaken carefully and thoughtfully, with the health of all New Yorkers at heart.

Thank you, as always, for your continuing efforts to fight this epidemic.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Farley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "y".

Thomas Farley, MD, MPH

cc: Michael R. Bloomberg
Monica Sweeney, MD, MPH