



June 23, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York, I write to thank you for de-funding community-based abstinence education. I am delighted with your decision to provide realistic, honest, and specific information for young people in this country. At the same time as I applaud you for shifting from a focus on abstinence-only education, I want to express disappointment with the small increase in HIV/AIDS funding in your budget and with your decision not to revoke the ban on federal funding for syringe exchange.

The HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York is a federally-mandated community planning body that is charged with allocating and distributing approximately \$100 million in Part A funds from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in the New York Eligible Metropolitan Area (EMA). The Planning Council is comprised of physicians, service providers, advocates, and PLWHA, all of whom are very knowledgeable about the complex mixture of medical and social services needed by the consumers and about the substantial benefits of syringe exchange in reducing HIV incidence in injection drug users (IDU).

Federal Funding for HIV/AIDS: The FY 2009 final budget allocated \$2,238.4 million for Ryan White Programs total and \$663.1 million for Part A programs. The FY 2010 President's Budget Request allocates \$2,292.4 million for Ryan White Programs total and \$671.1 million for Part A programs. The increase for Ryan White Programs total from FY 2009 to FY 2010 is only \$54 million, and the increase for Part A programs is only \$8 million. As you know, the CDC in 2008

revised its estimate of the number of new HIV infections per year from 40,000 to roughly 56,300 (approximately 40% higher). New York continues to be the epicenter of the epidemic: as of December 31, 2007 (the most recent year for which complete data are available), a total of 102,404 PLWHA were living in New York City. The small increase in funding allocated for their care in the federal budget is not sufficient to address their needs.

Syringe Exchange: Syringe exchange has proved effective in lowering the number of new HIV infections. More than 20,000 IDUs are living with diagnosed HIV/AIDS in the New York EMA.¹ Following the implementation of targeted HIV prevention measures for injection drug users, the rate of new HIV infections among IDU declined almost 80% from 1990 to 2002. During this time period in New York City, the number of needles exchanged grew from 250,000 to 3,000,000 while HIV incidence as measured in person-years at risk consistently dropped.² Syringe exchange does not increase the number of injection drug users³ but, rather, uses harm reduction principles to mitigate the health impact of the behavior. In addition, syringe exchange helps some drug users enter into structured substance use treatment and access primary care.

I very much hope that you will adjust the allocation of funding for treatment and care this year. If the time for adjustments to the FY 2010 budget has passed, I hope that you will reconsider the amount allocated next year. Likewise, I hope that you will agree to lift the ban on federal funding for syringe exchange.

Thank you very much in advance for all you have done and will continue to do for people living with HIV/AIDS.

All best wishes.



Soraya Elcock
Community Co-Chair
HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York

cc: Jeffrey Crowley
Peter Orszag

¹ Bennani et al., DOHMH special study, 2007, http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/dires/epi_prison%20survey%202008.pdf

² Des Jarlais et al., *Am J Pub Health* 2005;95;1439-1444.

³ Fisher et al., *JAIDS* 2003;33;199-205.