

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski,
Chairwoman, Senate Committee on
Appropriations

The Honorable Hal Rogers,
Chairman, House Committee on
Appropriations

The Honorable Tom Harkin,
Chairman, Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Jack Kingston,
Chairman, House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies

June 26, 2014

Dear Chairs,

As members of and advocates for communities that have been affected by heroin and prescription drug injection use, we are writing to you today to request that you lift the harmful ban on federal funding for syringe services programs (SSPs). In many cases, the ban has prevented local and state governments from exercising their own discretion in using federal funds to provide sterile syringes to drug users, and we believe it has exacerbated the heroin and prescription drug crisis that currently ravages many of our communities, as well as increasing the spread of HIV and hepatitis C. We therefore urge you to take action on this issue immediately and lift the federal ban, thus saving lives and money.

Under the ban, public health professionals in our communities are stripped of their expert judgment and effectiveness by being denied existing federal support for a tool that prevents the spread of HIV and hepatitis C, reduces injuries to law enforcement and first responders, and saves public sector resources.¹ As efforts to restrict the supply of prescription opioids have been enacted, we have seen a corollary rise in the use of heroin in our neighborhoods, and with it an increase in overdoses and exposure to infectious diseases.² Making SSPs available is an essential component of a comprehensive, public health approach to the heroin crisis, especially because they connect users to drug treatment and health care, overdose prevention, and provide vital tools and education that have been shown to save lives. Support for SSPs is strong among diverse stakeholders, including medical and public health professionals, law enforcement, and our impacted communities.³

¹ World Health Organization. (2004). Effectiveness of sterile needle and syringe programming in reducing HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users. Available online at <http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/idu/pubidu/en/>. (Date last accessed: April 16, 2014)

² Schwartz, Yarenda. June 2012. Painkiller use breeds new face of heroin addiction. Available online at http://dailynightly.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/06/19/12303942-painkiller-use-breeds-new-face-of-heroin-addiction?lite. (Date last accessed: April 16, 2014)

³ Pugel, Jim. (August 14, 2013). Why I'm Lobbying to Repeal the Federal Ban on Needle Exchange Funding. Available online at <http://slog.thestranger.com/slog/archives/2013/08/14/this-police-chief-says-lift-federal-ban-on-needle-exchange-funding>. (Date last accessed: April 16, 2014).

The ban on federal funding for SSPs takes the form of language inserted into the Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. The ban is a remnant of the polarized HIV/AIDS debate in the 1980s and 1990s, when some commentators incorrectly claimed that providing sterile syringes would increase drug use. There is no evidence that such programs promote or increase drug use or crime. On the contrary, research shows that SSPs can increase the likelihood of entering drug treatment five-fold, and consequently such programs are vital for our communities.⁴ Furthermore, these programs save taxpayer dollars by preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C, and protect law enforcement from being exposed to contaminated syringes. Studies have shown that for every dollar spent on SSPs, an estimated \$3-\$7 are saved in HIV treatment costs.⁵ SSPs are also crucial in addressing health disparities in our country, given that African-Americans are eleven times and Latinos five times more likely to contract HIV from an infected syringe than Caucasians.⁶

Lifting the ban on federal funding for SSPs would not add any additional costs to the federal budget, but would merely allow states and localities to spend federal dollars as they see fit, and would result in substantial cost-savings from averted HIV and hepatitis C infections for heavily burdened healthcare systems. We also believe it is an important step in tackling the current challenges we face surrounding heroin and prescription drug use. Accordingly, we urge you to remove this ban on SSPs from FY '15 appropriations legislation.

Sincerely,

Arizona

Arizona Hepatitis C Coalition

HIV/AIDS Law Project

Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation

Wingspan

California

California Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors (CAADAC)

California Center for Rural Policy

⁴ New Jersey Syringe Access Program Demonstration Project. (January 2010). Interim report: Implementation of P.L. 2006, c.99, "Blood-borne Disease Harm Reduction Act." Available online at http://www.state.nj.us/health/aids/documents/nj_sep_evaluation.pdf. (Date last accessed: April 16, 2014)

⁵ Nguyen, T.Q., Weir, B.W., Pinkerton, S.D., Des Jarlais, D.C., & Holtgrave, D. (July 23, 2012). Increasing investment in syringe exchange is cost-saving HIV prevention: modeling hypothetical syringe coverage levels in the United States(MOAE0204). Available online at <http://pag.aids2012.org/session.aspx?s=198>. (Date last accessed: April 16, 2014).

⁶ CDC. (December 2012). Estimated HIV incidence in the United States, 2007–2010. HIV Surveillance Supplemental Report 2012, 17(4), (6-7). Available online at http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/statistics_hssr_vol_17_no_4.pdf. (Date last accessed: April 16, 2014).

C.O.R.E. Medical Clinic, Inc.

Hep-TEV

Local Area Support for Hepatitis (LASH)

Pacific Pride Foundation

Robert G. Gish Consultants, LLC

San Francisco AIDS Foundation

San Luis Obispo Co. AIDS Support Network

Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics

The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center

Colorado

Boulder County AIDS Project

Colorado AIDS Project

Colorado Organizations Responding to AIDS (CORA)

Harm Reduction Action Center, Denver, CO

Hep C Connection, Denver CO

Delaware

Delaware HIV Consortium

Florida

Okaloosa AIDS Support and Informational Services, Inc. (OASIS) Ft. Walton Beach, FL

Georgia

AIDS Research Consortium of Atlanta

Georgia AIDS Coalition

Hawaii

CHOW Project

Hep Free Hawaii

Illinois

AIDS Foundation of Chicago

Asian Health Coalition

Chicago Recovery Alliance

Indiana

Harm Reduction Institute

Kentucky

Champions for a Drug Free Pendleton County

Transitions, Inc., Kentucky

Maine

Down East AIDS Network

Maine Harm Reduction Alliance

Maine Public Health Association

Maryland

AIDS Action Baltimore

Baltimore Student Harm Reduction Coalition

Maryland Hepatitis Coalition

Massachusetts

Boston Public Health Commission

Division of Infectious Disease, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Tapestry Health

Michigan

The Grand Rapids Red Project

Minnesota

LiverHope

Minnesota AIDS Project

New Jersey

Hepatitis C Association

Paterson Counseling Center, Inc.

South Jersey AIDS Alliance

New Mexico

Albuquerque Health Care for the Homeless, Inc.

New York

Community Health Action of Staten Island

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)

Harlem United Community AIDS Center

HIV Law Project

Housing Works

New York Harm Reduction Educators (NYHRE)

Staten Island LGBT Community Center

Treatment Action Group

The Center for HIV Law & Policy

The Hepatitis C Mentor & Support Group, Inc.

VOCAL New York

North Carolina

North Carolina AIDS Action Network

North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition

Ohio

AIDS Resource Center Ohio

Cincinnati Exchange Project

Ohio AIDS Coalition

Oregon

Caring Ambassadors Program

Cascade AIDS Project

Pennsylvania

ActionAIDS

Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force

Prevention Point Philadelphia

Prevention Point Pittsburgh

Project SAFE of Philadelphia

Puerto Rico

Intercambios – Puerto Rico

Tennessee

Nashville CARES

Texas

Legacy Community Health Services

Vermont

Vermont CARES

Washington

Hepatitis Education Project **W**

Washington, D.C.

DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice

HIPS, Washington, DC

Lifelong

START at Westminster

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Regional/National/International

30 for 30 Campaign

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Aids Community Research Initiative of America (ACRIA)

AIDS United

American Academy of HIV Medicine

American Association of Community Psychiatrists

The American Medical Student Association

American Psychological Association

American Public Health Association

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

Black Women's Health Imperative

Community Access National Network (CANN)

Digestive Disease National Coalition

Drug Policy Alliance

Family and Medical Counseling Service

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality

Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention (AVAC)

H.E.A.L.S of the South

Harm Reduction Coalition
HealthHIV
Hepatitis, AIDS, Research Trust
HIV Medicine Association
HIV Prevention Justice Alliance
Human Rights Campaign
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Latino Commission on AIDS
Legal Action Center
NAACP
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD)
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Council of Jewish Women
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund
National Hepatitis Patient Advocacy Committee
Positive Women's Network -USA (PWN-USA)
Presbyterian AIDS Network
National Latino AIDS Action Network (NLAAN)
National Women and AIDS Collective
National Minority Aids Council (NMAC)
One in Four Chronic Health
Project Inform
Regional AIDS Interfaith Network
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
Southern AIDS Coalition
Student Global AIDS Campaign
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
The AIDS Institute

The Association of Nurses in AIDS Care

The Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR)

The Global Justice Institute

The National Center for Transgender Equality

The National Hispanic Medical Association

The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable

The Ribbon Consulting Group

Treatment Access Expansion Project

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

Urban Coalition for HIV/AIDS Prevention Services (UCHAPS)