

May 3, 2007

The Honorable José E. Serrano
Chair, Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2227 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3216

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We, the undersigned organizations, are doing everything in our power to address the tragic HIV/AIDS epidemic in the District of Columbia—where nearly 1 out of every 50 residents has AIDS, and nearly *1 out of every 20* is infected with HIV.

Unfortunately, however, in one key way our efforts to stem the tide of the epidemic facing the Nation's Capital have been repeatedly stymied by congressional intervention: year after year a rider inserted in the D.C. appropriations bill has prohibited our elected leaders from using our own, locally-raised funds on needle exchange programs ("NEPs"), a proven intervention for preventing HIV in injection drug users.

This appropriations rider is unique and extraordinary; the District of Columbia is the only jurisdiction in the U.S. that must address HIV/AIDS while saddled with this congressional restriction. And the cruel irony is that Congress has continued to impose this restriction on the District, even though it has the highest annual rate of new AIDS cases of any major U.S. city.

As Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee responsible for the D.C. appropriations bill, you can lift this significant restriction on our efforts by *not* inserting the rider into the FY '08 bill. And that is what we strongly urge you to do.

About one-third of new AIDS cases in the District each year are attributable to injection drug use. Clearly, the delivery of effective HIV prevention services to the District's large population of injection drug users is an essential weapon in the fight against HIV/AIDS. An overwhelming body of scientific data demonstrates that NEPs, particularly when coupled with counseling and related services, significantly reduce the incidence of HIV. The data also show that NEPs may reduce drug use by serving as a gateway to drug treatment.

With our support, our locally-elected representatives have passed laws that authorize implementation of NEPs that offer an array of important services, such as HIV testing and drug treatment referrals. But the rider imposed on us by Congress keeps NEPs from having the resources needed to reach a critical segment of the city's large population of injection drug users.

The imposition of the appropriations rider on the District for the last nine years is particularly disturbing when one considers that during the same time period, NEPs funded by local governments across the U.S. have helped reduce rates of HIV infection in those jurisdictions, while rates in the District have continued to rise steadily.

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Please help us battle the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the District. Keep the FY '08 D.C. appropriations bill free of any provision that limits our ability to implement life-saving HIV prevention interventions for our residents.

If you or your staff has any questions or need additional information, please contact DC Appleseed's Executive Director, Walter Smith, at (202) 289-8007, extension 17.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
DC Appleseed

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Political Director
AIDS Action Council

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cc: Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton
Mayor Adrian M. Fenty
D.C. Council Chairman Vincent C. Gray
D.C. Councilmember David Catania