



February 11, 2016

OPEN LETTER TO THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY FROM THE HIV/AIDS COMMUNITY

Dear Entertainment Industry Leaders:

The undersigned organizations committed to addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic are writing to call upon you, as entertainment industry leaders, to continue to defend and support the rights and dignity of entertainment industry workers living with HIV and to help promote greater public education on HIV.

Data show that HIV remains a highly stigmatized disease across our society. We are aware that the industry has long been a leader on the issue of addressing HIV. Among recent activities we understand that SAG-AFSTRA, the Actors Fund, Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and many studios provide care and treatment, counseling, funding, education and more. Of course, every major studio and union has teams in AIDS Walk LA, and there is considerable programming such as MTV's "True Life" and "Shuga," HBO's "Normal" and many more that directly deal with the issues of stigma around HIV. At the same time, stigma continues to affect people living with HIV throughout the nation, as most recently demonstrated by the reaction to actor Charlie Sheen's public disclosure of his HIV status, after years of extortion and threats of public "shaming."¹

Regardless of celebrity status, we are sure you will agree with us that it is unacceptable that anyone should be stigmatized, shamed, threatened or mistreated on the basis of any aspect of their health. The flood of sensationalized media coverage arising from Sheen's disclosure provides leaders in the entertainment industry with a unique opportunity to push back against HIV stigma and to publicly defend the rights and dignity of entertainment industry workers living with HIV (as well as all affected individuals), while helping to educate the general public.

The highly effective HIV treatment available today can keep people healthy and greatly reduces their risk of transmitting the virus to others. However, when testing positive means getting shamed and losing job prospects, many people choose to remain in the dark. Research confirms that HIV stigma makes it harder to get people into care and to slow transmission of the virus.

The entertainment industry historically has played a high-profile role in supporting efforts to address the HIV epidemic. Following the example of that tradition, and in honor of those in the industry affected by

¹ "The Path to Charlie Sheen's H.I.V. Disclosure." *The New York Times*. Jan 5, 2016. Online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/arts/television/the-path-to-charlie-sheens-hiv-disclosure.html?hpw&rref=arts&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=well-region®ion=bottom-well&WT.nav=bottom-well&r=0/>.

HIV, we urge you to consider taking action to shed light on the injustice of continued HIV stigma and to assist in its eradication.

Specifically, we urge you to issue a strong public statement to your association, guild and union members: 1) reminding them of their [legal obligations](#) under the Americans with Disabilities Act not to discriminate against any employee on the basis of his or her HIV status; and 2) pointing to [current science and knowledge about the nature of HIV transmission and treatment](#). We hope that you will also use your high profile to send a powerful message to the broader public about the very limited routes of HIV transmission (which do not include casual contact or kissing), the greatly improved prognosis for those who discover their HIV-positive status early and are provided with meaningful access to care and treatment, and the damage that fear, ignorance and shaming do to individuals and communities. We also urge you to continue and perhaps even to increase the programming and high profile work that publicizes the importance of fighting HIV stigma.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. As organizations representing people living with HIV and those who provide healthcare and legal services to them, we are available to you as a resource if we can be of assistance. We can be reached by contacting either Naina Khanna, with the Positive Women's Network-USA (nkhanna@pwn-usa.org) or Kimberly Miller with the HIV Medicine Association (kmiller@hivma.org).

Sincerely,

Alabama

AIDS Alabama

Arizona

PowerSource Tucson, Inc.

California

AIDS Legal Services Project

AIDS Project of the East Bay

AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition

Black AIDS Institute

Erotic Service Providers Union

Forward Together

HIVE

Justice Now

Positive Women's Network - USA

PWN USA San Diego Region

Strategies for Change

ViiV Healthcare

WORLD

Colorado

Colorado Organizations Responding to AIDS (CORA)
Positive Women's Network-USA Colorado Chapter
PWN USA Colorado
Treatment Education Network
Western Colorado AIDS Project

District of Columbia

AIDS United
American Academy of HIV Medicine
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
HealthHIV
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors
National LGBTQ Task Force
Ryan White Medical Providers Coalition
The Women's Collective

Florida

AIDS Health Foundation Healthcare of South Florida
Community AIDS Network
Dab the AIDS Bear Project
New Wave Recovery and Counseling
Positive Champions Speakers Bureau Inc.
Positively U, Inc.
Rural Women's Health Project

Georgia

AIDS Athens - PWN
AIDS Research Consortium of Atlanta
AIDS Resource Council
Chattahoochee better way foundation
Counter Narrative Project
iknowAwareness
PWN-USA-GA
Sandy Rodgers Ministries
SisterLove, Inc.

Hawaii

Hawaii Island HIV/AIDS Foundation

Illinois

Agape Missions, NFP
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
Chicago Recovery Alliance
HIV Prevention Justice Alliance
RH Reality Check
Stars Clap Academy

Iowa

Siouxland Pride Alliance

Kansas

GRACE of Greater Kansas City

Louisiana

PWN-USA-Louisiana
Women With A Vision

Maryland

Center for Women Policy Studies
My Fabulous Disease
NMAC
PeterCares House

Massachusetts

Fenway Health

Michigan

CARES
Mr. Friendly
Unified
UNIFIED-HIV Health and Beyond

New York

ACRIA
Albany Damien Center
Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)
GLAAD
Harlem United
Iris House.Inc.
Lambda Legal

Latino Commission on AIDS

New York

Love Heals: The Alison Gertz Foundation for AIDS Education

National Black Leadership Commission On AIDS, Inc.

National Working Positive Coalition

Planned Parenthood of Nassau County NY

PWN-USA NYC

Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Research & Treatment (SMART)

SMART

The Well Project

Unity Fellowship Church

University of Buffalo School of Nursing

Ohio

AIDS Resource Center Ohio

Cincinnati Exchange Project

Miami Valley Positives for Positives

NEORAG/PROJECT H.E.A.L LEADER for Summit Country

Nightsweats & T-cells, Co.

PWN-USA Ohio Chapter

Pennsylvania

AIDS Care Group

GALAEI

House of Blahnik, Inc.

Positive Opportunities, Inc.

SERO Project

Wateree Aids Task Force

Tennessee

Friends 4 Life

Texas

Austin Harm Reduction Coalition

Houston AIDS Research Team CAB

Legacy Community Health

LIVE Consortium

Program for Wellness Restoration (PoWeR)

Standing Strong

Virgin Islands

Women Together for Change

Virginia

HIV Medicine Association

Washington

ATHENA Network

Gay City

Pierce County AIDS Foundation

TEAMS of Tri-Cities/Posi+ive Approach

Wisconsin

AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin