

April 2, 2020

The Honorable John Lewis
The U.S. House of Representatives
300 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 5806, HIV Epidemic Loan-Repayment Program (HELP) Act

Dear Congressman Lewis:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our strong appreciation for your leadership in addressing HIV workforce shortages by introducing H.R. 5806, the HIV Epidemic Loan-Repayment Program (HELP) Act. Our organizations represent HIV clinicians, dentists, social service providers, public health professionals, advocates, and people living with HIV.

Remarkable advances in HIV treatment enable people to live near-normal lifespans when diagnosed early and with access to regular HIV care and treatment.^{i ii} With access to HIV treatment and other services, people living with HIV can maintain suppression of HIV to undetectable levels, keeping them healthy and stopping transmission to sexual partners.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite these advances, more than 38,000 people are newly diagnosed with HIV each year, and of the 1.1 million people living with HIV in the U.S. only half are in regular care and benefiting from treatment.^{iv v} Disparities in HIV care and treatment are greatest among Black and Latino Americans who together represent 69% of new HIV diagnoses,^{vi} and in the Southern U.S., which accounts for 51% of new HIV diagnoses.^{vii}

People living with HIV managed by expert HIV clinicians have better outcomes and yet as more people need lifelong HIV care, the number of HIV clinicians entering the field falls well short of demand.^{viii ix} The HELP Act would incentivize and support qualified clinicians and dentists to enter the field of HIV medicine and dentistry by authorizing a new program that would offer up to \$250,000 in educational loan repayment to physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and dentists in exchange for up to five years of service in high need areas. At this pivotal time when we have the tools to end HIV as an epidemic in the U.S., and a federal initiative and a plan to do so, the HELP Act is critical to reverse workforce shortages that are particularly acute in the Southern U.S.^{x xi}

Thank you for your steadfast commitment to improving the lives of people living with HIV. We offer our strong support for the HELP Act to help ensure the robust HIV workforce necessary to improve access to HIV treatment for all and to end HIV as an epidemic in the U.S.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the undersigned organizations,

ADAP Advocacy Association
Advocates for Youth
AIDS Alabama
AIDS Alabama South, LLC
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
AIDS United
American Academy of HIV Medicine

APLA Health
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
Black AIDS Institute
CAEAR Coalition
CARES of Southwest Michigan
Cascade AIDS Project
Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation
Community Access National Network (CANN)
Department of Medicine, West Virginia University
Equality California
Equality North Carolina
Equitas Health
Georgia AIDS Coalition
Georgia Equality
Georgia Rural Urban Summit and others
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Grady Health System - Ponce de Leon Center
Hennepin County
HIV + Hepatitis Policy Institute
HIV Medicine Association
HIV Dental Alliance
Howard Brown Health
Human Rights Campaign
Hyacinth AIDS Foundation
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Association of Providers of AIDS Care
John Snow, Inc. (JSI)
Latino Commission on AIDS
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Mercy Care
NAACP
National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
National Working Positive Coalition
NMAC
North Carolina AIDS Action Network
PFLAG National
Poz Military Veterans USA INTL
Prevention Access Campaign
Rhode Island Public Health Institute
Ryan White Medical Providers Association
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Silver State Equality-Nevada
Southern AIDS Coalition
The AIDS Institute
The Well Project
Thrive Alabama
Treatment Action Group
Trillium Health

- ⁱSamji H, Cescon A, Hogg RS, Modur SP, Althoff KN, et al. (2013) Closing the Gap: Increases in Life Expectancy among Treated HIV-Positive Individuals in the United States and Canada. *PLoS ONE* 8(12): e81355.
- ⁱⁱ Marcus JL, Chao CR, Leyden WA, et al. Narrowing the Gap in Life Expectancy Between HIV-Infected and HIV-Uninfected Individuals with Access to Care. *J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr*. 2016 Sep 1;73(1):39-46.
- ⁱⁱⁱ RW Eisinger, CW Dieffenbach, AS Fauci. HIV viral load and transmissibility of HIV infection: undetectable equals untransmittable. *Journal of the American Medical Association* DOI: 10.1001/jama.2018.21167 (2019).
- ^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC HIV Prevention Progress Report, 2019. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/policies/progressreports/cdc-hiv-preventionprogressreport.pdf>.
- ^v Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Understanding the HIV Care Continuum. July 2019. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/library/factsheets/cdc-hiv-care-continuum.pdf>.
- ^{vi} Kaiser Family Foundation. Black Americans and HIV. February 7, 2020. Available at: <https://www.kff.org/hiv/aids/fact-sheet/black-americans-and-hiv-aids-the-basics/>.
- ^{vii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV in the Southern United States. September 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/policies/cdc-hiv-in-the-south-issue-brief.pdf>
- ^{viii} Rackal, JM, et al. Provider training and experience for people living with HIV/AIDS. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2011;15(6):CD003938.
- ^{ix} Weiser J, Beer I, West B, et al. Qualifications, Demographics, Satisfaction, and Future Capacity of the HIV Care Provider Workforce in the United States, 2013–2014. *Clin Infect Dis*. 2016 Oct 1; 63(7): 966–975. doi: 10.1093/cid/ciw442.
- ^x Fauci AS, Redfield RR, Sigounas G, Weahkee MD, Giroir BP. Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for the United States. *JAMA*. 2019;321(9):844–845. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2019.1343>.
- ^{xi} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. 2016. State-Level Projections of Supply and Demand for Primary Care Practitioners: 2013-2025. Rockville, Maryland. Available at: <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhw/health-workforce-analysis/research/projections/primary-care-state-projections2013-2025.pdf>