



DC Fights Back

December 29, 2008

Parag Mehta
President Elect Obama Transition Team

Dear Mr. Mehta,

DC Fights Back is an all volunteer network of people living with HIV/AIDS and their allies working to engage ourselves and the community in every aspect of HIV advocacy for District residents. We work to end stigma to ensure the best possible treatment and care for those living with HIV/AIDS and implement the best possible science based HIV prevention for all.

Increasing evidence points to the role of housing-or lack of housing- for the continuing HIV epidemic and health disparities. Being homeless magnifies the risk for contracting HIV and it is no surprise that HIV prevalence among the homeless is estimated to be nearly three times higher than that of the general population. Preliminary results from the Housing and Health (H&H) Study, funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), show significant improvements in housing status among all study participants, leading to significant improvements in health outcomes while also sharply reducing the use of costly emergency care services, opportunistic infections and sex trade.

Here in the District, the Department of Health confirms at least 278 people with HIV/AIDS are currently waiting for housing. Sadly, the needs of many others likely go uncounted. The fact of the matter is that stable housing is effective HIV prevention, treatment, and health care.

It is critical that more PLWHA (persons living with HIV/AIDS) be involved in policy implementation and in the administration. We would like to see them have leadership in community collaboration efforts and in the development of the National AIDS Strategy. We would also like for there to be more outreach to PLWHA's in all 50 states. DC Fights back is willing to be that conduit locally and the Campaign to End AIDS can assist in making those connections nationally. Too often, the voice of those infected and affected is not heard. We ask for more transparency between HUD, HOPWA, and HHS and less finger pointing. The HOPWA program serves only 67,000 households per year nationwide, yet it is estimated that 500,000 households will need housing support at some time during their illness.

With the global economy and U.S. housing market in crisis, we know the increase in home foreclosures and other housing instabilities will greatly impact HIV positive people. Housing is life or death for people living with HIV and we urge you to recognize this urgency in your work.

Sincerely yours,

George Kerr