AIDS IN AMERICA

July 16, 2014

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are writing to congratulate you on becoming the 22nd Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and to express our strong interest in working with you on meeting the goals of President Obama’s National HIV/AIDS Strategy and ending AIDS in our country and throughout the world. As leaders in advocating for domestic HIV/AIDS policies and programs that include AIDS research, HIV prevention, and HIV care and treatment, we respectfully ask for an opportunity to meet with you in the near future.

For people living with HIV/AIDS and those who are at risk of HIV infection, this is a time of unprecedented hope and opportunity for success. Through advances in AIDS research, major scientific discoveries have occurred in both the treatment and prevention of HIV. With implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), together with the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, more people with HIV can be linked to and retained in care, as well as adherent to their HIV treatment. Through HIV prevention programs at the CDC, we can implement High-Impact Prevention strategies utilizing a combination of scientifically proven, cost-effective, and scalable interventions targeted to the populations and geographic areas most heavily impacted, ensuring the most efficient use of funds.

In order to realize our shared goals, however, much work remains. While an estimated 1.1 million people are living with HIV today, some 200,000 are not aware of their infection and there are approximately 50,000 new infections each year. Some groups, particularly gay men and African Americans, are disproportionately impacted by HIV. According to the CDC, only 37 percent of people living with HIV in the U.S. are retained in HIV care, only 33 percent have been prescribed antiretroviral treatment, and only 25 percent are virally suppressed.

During your Senate confirmation process, we were very encouraged by your expressions of support for the National HIV/AIDS Strategy and your recognition of the strong role HHS must play if we are to achieve an AIDS-free generation. Your stated commitment to funding the Ryan White Program is also very much appreciated. Your sincere dedication to people living with HIV is evident by your previous leadership positions in the non-profit sector and through your service in federal government.
Now, as Secretary of HHS you will have the ability to lead and coordinate our federal government’s response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic through such agencies as the CDC, HRSA, the NIH, SAMHSA, and CMS, all of which have a substantial role in achieving the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to discuss some of our priorities and to hear your vision for how we can most effectively combat HIV/AIDS in the United States. We are particularly interested in 1) implementing the ACA in a way that meets the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS; 2) ensuring continuation of a strong Ryan White Program; 3) implementing effective prevention programs at the CDC; 4) further streamlining and better coordinating activities across HHS agencies and others, such as HUD; and, 5) ensuring continued prioritization of HIV/AIDS research at the NIH.

We are grateful for the historical and unprecedented leadership of the Obama Administration in addressing HIV in the United States, and are confident in your ability to contribute to that progress through your new position. We would very much appreciate an opportunity to discuss these matters more with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
Community Access National Network (CANN)

Nancy Bernstine
Executive Director
National AIDS Housing Coalition

Rainey Campbell
Executive Director
Southern AIDS Coalition

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