Activists Protest at U.S. State Department to Restore Global HIV and AIDS Programs

HIV activists demand the Trump White House fully restore PEPFAR funding following a deadly freeze.

February 6, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

On February 6, activists are rallying at U.S. State Department headquarters in Washington, DC, to condemn the Trump administration's attack on people living with and at risk of HIV and AIDS throughout the world, including dismantling USAID and freezing billions in funds to the President's Emergency Plan to Fight AIDS (PEPFAR), a global health initiative that aims to save lives and prevent HIV and AIDS. PEPFAR provides lifesaving treatment to over 20 million people living with HIV, mostly in Africa.

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Treatment Action Group (TAG)—an advocacy think tank focused on eradicating HIV, hepatitis C and tuberculosis—coorganized the action in DC, which included well-known HIV activist groups such as ACT UP, HealthGAP, Housing Works and others.

HIV advocates protest funding cuts to PEPFARTim Murphy

On day one of taking office, President Trump signed an executive order that banned any new government spending on foreign aid projects. This was followed by an unexpected "stop-work order" issued January 24, which means that funding to the PEPFAR, even for existing grants and contracts, is frozen. For more background, see "Trump Officials Order Halth to Funding of PEPFAR Global AIDS Program" from January 28.

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In today’s action, activists shut down the intersection outside the State Department in a bold act of civil disobedience, according to Housing Works.

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“This broad attack on one of the most successful humanitarian aid programs that the U.S. has ever created flies in the face of over two decades of generosity by the American people since PEPFAR was set up,” TAG executive director Mark Harrington said in a press statement from the group.

Established in 2003, PEPFAR is the largest commitment by any country to address a single disease. Since its inception, PEPFAR has invested over $110 billion in the global HIV response, saved 26 million lives and prevented millions of HIV acquisitions in more than 50 countries.

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“Activists have spent four decades fighting for expanded government investment to prevent, treat, and ultimately end HIV,” Harrington said. “We’re unwilling to stand by and let the new

administration destroy decades of progress against one of the world's deadliest pandemics."

U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D–NJ) told media outlet Devex: "We will fight legally, we will fight procedurally, and we will also fight legislatively. We will stand up. We will speak up. We will rise up."

Go to TAG's Bluesky account for updates on the protest and ways to help.

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In related news, the Trump administration has also taken steps to remove scientific knowledge and guidance for communities impacted by HIV and AIDS.

For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal health agencies removed hundreds of pages of HIV-related information from their websites last week as part of a government-wide purge triggered by Trump's executive orders on "gender ideology" and "DEI" (diversity, equity, and inclusion). Much of the content was back up by Tuesday, but transgender people have largely been edited out.

During this time of uncertainty, nearly 70 U.S. businesses have committed to address HIV within

and beyond their own walls through the U.S. Business Action to End HIV (USBAEH), a public health/private sector partnership started in 2022 within Health Action Alliance.

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