A Symbolic Funeral Protest in DC Warns of Disintegrating HIV Programs

Living obituaries and AIDS pallbearers at the Save HIV Funding Campaign's protest ask, "Do we invest in life, or do we invest in death?"

March 17, 2026 By Save HIV Funding

On Monday, March 16, long-term HIV survivors, health advocates, community health providers, and faith leaders gathered in Washington, DC, to hold a symbolic funeral protest and celebration of life service to sound the alarm over the growing instability in HIV prevention and care funding across the United States, and the impact on America's national health care infrastructure.

Organized by the Save HIV Funding Campaign and held at Renaissance Arlington Capital View Hotel (host hotel for this year's AIDSWatch conference), the demonstration used the imagery of a memorial service to warn that decades of progress in the fight against HIV could be reversed if critical prevention and treatment programs continue to face funding threats and policy instability.

Speakers and participants included:

The Rev. Elder Carmarion D. Anderson, Minister for Congregational Leadership, United Church of Christ National Ministries; Jeremiah Johnson, Save HIV Funding Campaign co-founder and executive director of PrEP4All, who acted as the day's "funeral director," and Maxx Boykin, Campaign Manager for the Save HIV Funding Campaign.

Aubrianna Escalera Naranjo, COO and president of Poder Unides Inc. in Georgia, speaks at the Save HIV Funding Campaign’s Funeral Protest and Celebration of Life on March 16, 2026, in Washington, DC.Courtesy of Getty Image for Save HIV Funding Campaign/Shannon Finney

Speakers and Living Obituary Readers:

- Kamaria Laffrey, Co-Executive Director, SERO Project in Florida
- Barb Cardell, Program Director, Positive Women’s Network-USA in Colorado
- Aubrianna Escalera Naranjo, COO & President, Poder Unides Inc. in Georgia
- Vincent Crisostomo, Director of Aging Services, SF AIDS Foundation in California
- Paul Aguilar, Author and Activist in California
- Malcolm Reid, Co-Chair, U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus; Founder & CEO, Unity Arc Advocacy Group in Georgia

Transcripts from their obituary reads can be found HERE.

Advocates gather at the Save HIV Funding Campaign's Funeral Protest and Celebration of Life on March 16, 2026, in Washington, DC.Courtesy of Getty Image for Save HIV Funding Campaign/Shannon Finney

Speakers emphasized that the systems supporting HIV prevention, treatment, and care were built with bipartisan support over decades. They warned that weakening these programs not only puts vulnerable communities at risk but also dismantles a public health model pioneered by the HIV response that has guided how the United States responds to large-scale health emergencies.

Jeremiah Johnson, Save HIV Funding Campaign co-founder and executive director of PrEP4All, speaks at the Save HIV Funding Campaign's

Funeral Protest and Celebration of Life on March 16, 2026, in Washington, DC.Courtesy of Getty Image for Save HIV Funding Campaign/Shannon Finney

Jeremiah Johnson, Save HIV Funding Campaign co-founder and executive director of PrEP4All shared remarks, saying in part:

“We’re going to make sure that our policymakers hear us loud and clear: do we invest in life, or do we invest in death? Do we invest in care, or do we invest in bombs?. We have to save our care, save our prevention, save our research, save our housing. And we have to do it, not just for those of us in America, but we have to do it globally.”

The gathering brought together advocates, community members, and people directly impacted by HIV policy decisions. Participants highlighted concerns about recent funding instability affecting programs that provide prevention services, treatment access, and medication assistance for people living with HIV.

Malcolm Reid, co-chair of the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus and the founder and CEO of Unity Arc Advocacy Group of Georgia, speaks at the Save HIV Funding Campaign’s Funeral Protest and Celebration of Life on March 16, 2026, in Washington, DC.Courtesy of Getty Image for Save HIV Funding Campaign/Shannon Finney

Reading a living obituary of himself, Malcolm Reid, Co-Chair, U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus; Founder & CEO, Unity Arc Advocacy Group in Georgia said:

“Malcolm’s death was not inevitable. It was planned. It was engineered. Treatment worked when it was uninterrupted. Viral suppression was not a miracle. It was access + consistency + trust. When

the system broke that trust, when it replaced clarity with confusion, it did not merely create inconvenience. It created funerals.”

Kamaria Laffrey, co-executive director of the SERO Project in Florida, speaks at the Save HIV Funding Campaign’s Funeral Protest and Celebration of Life on March 16, 2026, in Washington, DC.Courtesy of Getty Image for Save HIV Funding Campaign/Shannon Finney

The celebration of life-styled program included remarks from advocates, community leaders, and public health voices, along with readings and a musical/gospel element honoring the generations of activists, caregivers, and providers who built the modern HIV response infrastructure.

Advocates warned that weakening federal HIV programs could reverse decades of progress made in reducing new HIV infections and expanding treatment access.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/symbolic-funeral-protest-dc-warns-disintegrating-hiv-programs