



Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:


On behalf of the HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York (Planning Council), I write to request that you withdraw the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's recently launched public service announcement (PSA) on HIV/AIDS entitled It's Never Just HIV. The PSA, targeting young Black and Latino men who have sex with men (MSM), shows a patient with AIDS in a hospital bed and mentions three complications of AIDS: dementia, anal cancer, and osteoporosis. While older adults living with HIV may be at greater risk of developing these conditions, the PSA implies that young adults living with HIV suffer from these conditions, too – and that is false. The PSA intensifies stigma against people living with this condition and against gay and bisexual men in general at a time when we are encouraging young MSM to be tested for HIV and PLWHA to enter care and anticipate a long and healthy life.

The Planning Council is comprised of service providers, governmental representatives, advocates, and people living with HIV/AIDS, all of whom are Mayoral appointees. Collectively, Planning Council members have decades of experience with this virus and know that fear-based tactics simply do not work. These approaches are counterproductive, drive individuals in denial further into the closet, and may discourage individuals at risk from being tested. We support efforts to prioritize engaging this severely impacted population with supportive HIV prevention, care, and treatment messages. Obtaining gay men's input into effective strategies for implementing prevention, treatment, and care and acknowledging their resilience in the face of this epidemic will be far more successful than perpetuating outdated images of sickness, dying, and death.

Planning Council members respectfully request that the Health Department withdraw the PSA from television and remove the link on the Department's website. We are convinced that education and information are far more useful weapons against this virus than sensationalist and lurid images. We call upon

the Health Department to collaborate with community members to develop effective campaigns, rather than propagating distorted and homophobic messages.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Lesieur', with a horizontal line underneath.

Matthew Lesieur
Planning Council Community Co-Chair

cc: Thomas Farley, MD, MPH
Monica Sweeney, MD, MPH