VIA EMAIL AND REGULAR MAIL

February 10, 2015

Chad Griffin

President

Human Rights Campaign

1640 Rhode Island Ave. N.W.

Washington, DC 20036-3278

Dear Mr. Griffin:

We enclose a copy of the open letter ACT UP New York has directed to Human Rights Campaign regarding the fight against HIV.

We thank you kindly in advance for your urgent attention and timely reply.

On behalf of ACT UP NY,

Jeton Ademaj

Brandon Cuicchi

James Robinson

Luis Santiago

Victor Thompson

Andrew Velez

Contact person: Brandon Cuicchi (646) 284-2948

cc: Fred Sainz, VP Communications and Marketing, HRC

cc: Jeff Krehely, VP and Chief Foundation Officer, HRC

cc: Marvell L. Terry, II, HIV/AIDS Project Fellow HRC

Enclosure: Open Letter

AN OPEN LETTER FROM ACT UP NY

TO HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was formed as a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis.

Even though the AIDS crisis seems to have abated in the eyes of many, HIV is still a crisis for every person that contracts it or that sees their health deteriorate due to its effects or that suffers from the stigma and criminalization attached to it.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC):

* While HIV rates fell 33% across the board between the years 2002 and 2011, gay and bisexual men ages 13-24 saw their infection rate more than double from about 3,000 to about 7,000 per 100,000.
* Youth aged 13 to 24 accounted for an estimated 26% of all new HIV infections in the United States in 2010.
* Most new HIV infections among youth occur among gay and bisexual males; there was a 22% increase in estimated new infections in this group from 2008 to 2010.
* Almost 60% of youth with HIV in the United States do not know they are infected.

It is in this context that ACT UP NY has decided to protest the neglect of HIV/AIDS by most mainstream LGBT organizations.

Considering the status of Human Rights Campaign (HRC) as the nation’s largest LGBT rights group, several members of ACT UP proposed that a protest be specifically held during HRC´s annual Greater NY Gala (a corporate awards and fundraiser event) on January 31 in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. This protest was successfully held along with solidarity protests in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

During the course of more than a month, ACT UP discussed and planned this event. It invited HRC to comment on our general and specific concerns. We are glad for the opportunity to have met with the HRC’s Vice President, Communications and Marketing, and HRC´s Vice President and Chief Foundation Officer who gave us HRC´s views on the matter and expressed their commitment to continue improving on HRC´s contribution in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

It is in this spirit of open collaboration, but also constructive criticism, that we address this open letter to HRC.

We believe that with HIV rates still rising, most notably among younger people, there is no reason why HIV should receive much less attention than marriage equality and employment discrimination. Health comes first and HIV is the most important health issue when it comes to the LGBT community, which is why we demand that HRC and other LGBT groups again make it a priority.

HRC´s corporate rankings for commitment to equality don’t even mention HIV. HRC can be more vocal in demanding corporate social responsibility and stop allowing businesses to “pinkwash” their corporate records via HRC.

HRC recognizes major multinationals for their LGBT commitment but doesn’t demand that they contribute to the prevention, treatment, cure and destigmatization of HIV, especially those corporations well suited to make significant contributions through research, healthcare, media and advocacy against discrimination.

Though we welcome HRC's openness to discuss with us the work that has been done and that is envisaged, ACT UP NY would like to publicly make known and stress our view of what is needed from major LGBT organizations when it comes to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

As regards HRC we demand the following:

1. HRC should use its resources in a more visible and effective way beyond Washington, DC. HRC should not only commit to being more transparent in how it invests its resources on HIV, but also support grassroots organizations doing advocacy at other levels. In particular HRC should:

A) Support the work of community based organizations, especially on issues like fundraising for gay and HIV+ youth homeless shelters and housing solutions.

B) Encourage its local chapters to engage in fundraising and policy advocacy at the state, city and community level.

C) Collaborate more with community based organizations and gay apps/sites to improve policies to deal with prevention and stigma.

D) Establish a better balance between the issues it addresses in its communications strategy (e.g. web page, press releases).

E) Continue supporting changes to discriminatory policies, especially access to organ transplants, blood donation, access to treatment for major co-morbidities (e.g. Hep C), and help the organizations fighting for these changes.

2. HRC should support a renewed focus on stigma and criminalization of HIV. In particular HRC should:

A) Support local organizations that will deal with state reviews of criminalization laws under the proposed federal REPEAL Act. Support to national organizations should continue until the federal legislation is passed.

B) Target stigma where it counts. Start with online gay apps and sites, but most importantly in real life. Targeting HIV stigma through online campaigns will not be as effective until people realize that it is their real-life friends and regular acquaintances who are affected by HIV stigma and criminalization.

3. HRC should step up its work on HIV prevention. In particular HRC should:

A) Continue funding for online dissemination of information about PrEP and PEP. More emphasis on PEP and the ever-increasing urgency within the 36-hour window, as well as more outreach via the most popular non-app based gay sites.

B) Support local organizations that distribute condoms, viable lubricants and safe sex kits instead of duplicating their work.

C) Continue its advocacy in favor of Ryan White and other federal funding, especially to deal with access to PrEP (ACA gap) and support the implementation of the National Strategy on HIV, including by funding the participation of community organizations in the Federal AIDS Policy Partnership.

D) Support local groups working to pass policies that guarantee access to PrEP at the state level.

E) Help develop a strategy about increased affordable access to PrEP, especially in view of the forthcoming patent expiration.

F) Focus on the repeal of the Helms Amendment, that thwarts accurate, honest and useful education about HIV prevention and treatment, targeting in the short term the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines that severely restrict the language that can be used in the creation of HIV/STD prevention materials.

G) Make it a priority to re-repeal the federal prohibition on funding Syringe Exchange.

H) Support state and local efforts to decriminalize the possession of condoms and HIV prevention material as well as initiatives to help sex workers with access to PrEP/PEP/TASP and guarantee access in prisons too.

4. HRC should push corporations to make greater contributions on HIV quality of life issues such as access to treatment and prevention, homelessness, stigma, etc. In particular HRC should:

A) Include HIV specific criteria in its Corporate Equality Index by 2016.

B) Help rank the private sector by its contributions to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

C) Help name and shame those corporations that are an obstacle in this fight (e.g. Pharmaceuticals, Insurance, gay sites/apps).

D) Help rank and/or recognize corporations as well as foundations and research organizations that make the best (and biggest) contributions in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

E) Consider the negative impact of some corporate behavior on particularly vulnerable LGBT communities when evaluating corporations ("pinkwashing").

F) HRC should support the work of other organizations that can contribute to these rankings.

5. HRC should be transparent in the use of its resources and on what proportion of them is devoted to the fight against HIV/AIDS, particularly in its financial and in-kind support to other organizations. HRC´s website should have a dedicated section where this information can be easily found by year, issue and organization, along with the rest of the information about its contributions to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

6. HRC should appoint an HIV Liaison with powers of internal coordination and appropriate resources to work effectively with external constituents.

We insist on our last demand and point to the need to guarantee stability in this position. A staff member should be appointed who can provide continuity to the work and be able to engage full time with grassroots organizations at the federal, state and local levels.

Periodic reports by the Liaison to active community groups are a critical aspect of effective community engagement. ACT UP would welcome such reports on HRC´s work as a way to follow up on the commitments expressed in your letter. ACT UP meets every Monday night at 7pm in New York City at the LGBT Community Center, 208 West 13th Street off 7th Ave.

ACT UP understands that HRC has begun to devote more attention to HIV, and we hope to enhance our knowledge of HRC's HIV-related work past and present, along with future efforts planned. We are concerned that the most powerful lobbying organization in the US on behalf of sexual minorities is not as prominent as our various communities need you to be on these issues, and wish to identify ways to help remedy any real or perceived disconnect between our Queer Community's most powerful lobbyists and our most disadvantaged members.

We need HRC to be with us, on the ground, from New York to California, from Deep South Mississippi to Midwest Illinois, indeed all over America.

ACT UP would like to agree with HRC on how follow up will be given to our concerns.

HRC´s new HIV policy fellow was not present at our meeting and no particular mechanism or procedure was established by which we can continue this dialogue on how HRC can make specific contributions on those issues that HRC and ACT UP would agree can be prioritized.

At our meeting there seemed to be agreement on the following commitments from HRC:

1. To give more prominence to HIV in its communications policy, particularly on the website.

2. To visit an NYC homeless shelter.

3. To continue the work on access to organ transplants for people with HIV.

4. To develop ratings of corporations on their contributions to the fight against HIV.

We would welcome if HRC could assign an officer (which could be your new policy fellow if given the appropriate powers and resources as mentioned above) to meet with us periodically to develop a follow up plan for these as well as other possible commitments at the earliest opportunity.

As a volunteer organization, ACT UP would prefer if meetings continue to be held in New York City. We would be available to work by email as much as necessary.

We expect HRC will demonstrate its commitment and accountability on this issue. We can contribute both to make HRC´s work on HIV more visible as well as more targeted.

We offer HRC a partnership through which we can engage together with many community groups in New York City and elsewhere to address at least some of the priority issues discussed in this letter.

###