

# BARACK OBAMA

September 19, 2008

Dear Friends,

Joe and I wanted to thank you all for attending the U.S. Conference on AIDS this weekend. We also wanted to express our gratitude for all you are doing to increase awareness about HIV and AIDS here in the U.S.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is a global challenge – but our efforts to stop it must begin here at home. I am proud that Joe and I have both worked closely on this issue in the U.S. Senate.

Last month, we learned that the number of annual HIV infections is up to 50 percent higher than has been previously estimated for the last 10 years. Specifically, we know now that an estimated 56,000 Americans are infected with HIV every year. These new figures should bring new focus to our efforts to address AIDS and HIV here at home. Reports like this not only rouse our collective conscience – they provide us with a real opportunity to understand the challenge before us.

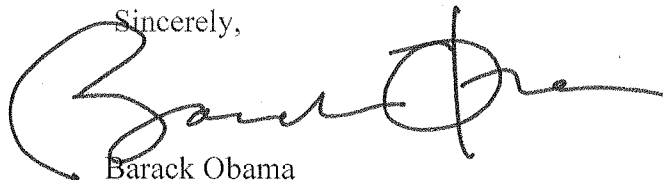
Confronting this kind of crisis demands a comprehensive approach. That is why Joe and I are committed to developing a National AIDS Strategy to decrease new HIV infections and improve health outcomes for Americans living with HIV/AIDS. We need aggressive federal action, including new investments that are matched with state and local initiatives. Across the nation, we need to prevent the spread of HIV – and get people into treatment – by expanding access to testing and comprehensive education programs.

Combating HIV/AIDS also demands combating the disparities in our society, including making health care affordable and accessible for all Americans, covering low-income HIV patients with Medicaid, and supporting programs to provide housing for people with HIV/AIDS. If we leave people without hope or help, we will not turn the corner against this epidemic.

Tackling HIV/AIDS among African Americans and other groups will also require a change in attitudes. We have to overcome the stigma that surrounds HIV/AIDS – a stigma that is too often tied to homophobia. We need to talk about HIV/AIDS in our communities. We need to encourage folks to get tested – which is why Michelle and I were tested for HIV during a trip to Kenya. In short, we have to take this on clearly and directly.

Every time someone is infected with HIV/AIDS, they are infected with a virus that could have been prevented. Every time someone dies of AIDS untreated, they are dying prematurely. We have a moral obligation to join together to meet this challenge – in our communities, our country, and around the world – and to do so with the urgency this epidemic demands.

Sincerely,



Barack Obama



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