APLA
AIDS Project Los Angeles

The David Geffen Center
611 South Kingsley Drive
Los Angeles, California 90005
Telephone: 213.201.1600
Fax: 213.201.1595
www.apla.org

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Executive Director
Craig E. Thompson

May 24, 2010

Jerry A. Holmberg, PhD
Executive Secretary
Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability
Office of Public Health and Science
Department of Health and Human Services
1101 Wooton Parkway, Suite 250
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Dr. Holmberg,

I am pleased that the Health and Human Services Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability (ACBSA) is planning to review the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) decades-long ban on blood donation by any man who has had sex with another man since 1977. I strongly urge the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to review its policy prohibiting gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) from donating blood.

The FDA's current blood donor eligibility policies are largely inconsistent, imposing significantly less restrictive deferrals to heterosexual men and women who engage in high-risk sexual behavior, yet banning gay and bisexual men who are HIV-negative, consistently practice safe sex, or are in monogamous, long-term relationships. This policy reinforces inaccurate stereotypes about gay men and HIV, and results in a significant loss of healthy blood donors.

The advent of new HIV testing technologies, which can detect HIV directly and has a window period of only 9-11 days after infection, has provided scientific and technological reasons to reconsider the policy. In the face of chronic blood shortages in the nation's blood supply, the unnecessary exclusion of large numbers of HIV-negative blood donors may harm patients in need of blood transfusions.

I join a growing consensus of voices who have called for reform of the FDA's donor eligibility policy. Many public health experts, the American Red Cross, the American Association of Blood Banks, America's Blood Centers, and others have supported reforming the policy. Additionally, 18 U.S. Senators, as well as U.S. Representatives, have recently sent letters to the FDA calling for the long-standing policy's review and modification.

It is both timely and necessary that an exhaustive review of alternative policies is conducted. I encourage Health and Human Services (HHS) and the FDA to act quickly to address our mutual concern for expanding the blood donor pool and ensuring the safety and adequacy of our nation's blood supply.

Sincerely,

Craig E. Thompson

Craig E. Thompson

Executive Director