



December 13, 2023

Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

The Partnership to End HIV, STDs, and Hepatitis writes to bring to your attention the effect that the \$400 million rescission, enacted by the Fiscal Responsibility Act, will have on disease intervention specialists (DIS). The result of this rescission will be the layoff of 719 full-time employees in the next year and repercussions across the syndemics of HIV, STIs, viral hepatitis, and drug overdose. We write today to request that \$25 million of this rescission be restored, in FY'24, to avert this loss.

In November, the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSO) conducted a survey of all CDC DIS funding recipients to determine the impact of the rescission.¹ The survey results and funding calculations indicate that, if the \$25 million were provided in FY'24, it would provide sufficient funding to prevent layoffs in the next year. Additional funding will be needed in FY'25 and beyond to prevent layoffs in future years. According to the CDC's own analysis, DIS averted more than half of the country's potential congenital syphilis cases in 2020.²

The loss of skills and knowledge among the workforce will cause sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates to increase, and contradicts the goals of the STI National Strategic Plan and the National Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Syndemic Task Force. This workforce played a lifesaving role during COVID-19, were ready to help impacted communities respond quickly to last year's mpox outbreak, and continue to help states combat rising rates of STIs, which have reached alarming levels. Congenital syphilis rates, in particular, have increased 959% since 2012.

The effects of gutting this syndemic workforce extend well beyond STI prevention efforts; the rescission will also impact HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis, drug user health programs, state laboratories, and outbreak emergency response. In addition to the loss of DIS, without additional funding, reductions will also occur in the follow areas: PrEP navigators, surveillance staff, public health nurses, and public health educators working in HIV prevention, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis, and other public health support staff.

We urge you to devote \$25 million to the DIS workforce to avert the layoffs.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Stephanie Arnold Pang at sarnold@ncsddc.org or 612-220-2446.

Sincerely,

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¹ Surveyed jurisdictions (and respondents) included cities, territories, and states directly funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from all regions of the country. NCSO received data from 43 jurisdictions resulting in a 73% response rate across all 59 DIS Workforce Development grantees.

² "Performance Measures 2020: Potential Congenital Syphilis Cases Averted." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, Division of STD Prevention. Issued July 2022.



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