



THE DAVID GEFFEN CENTER
APLA DENTAL SERVICES
NECESSITIES OF LIFE PROGRAM
Long Beach South Los Angeles
San Fernando Valley Wilshire Center

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Public Statement on the Removal of Charles L. Henry

AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) is deeply concerned over the Department of Health Services' (DHS) removal of Charles L. Henry from his position as Director, Office of AIDS Programs and Policy, to an as yet unnamed position within DHS.

The removal occurs at a particularly crucial time for HIV/AIDS funding in Los Angeles County, with Reauthorization of the Ryan White CARE Act scheduled for September of 2005. While DHS cited in its letter to the community many of Mr. Henry's achievements during his seven years as director of OAPP, many questions remain about the timing and politics of the removal.

HIV/AIDS providers and advocates, and most importantly, their clients, deserve an honest accounting of the steps that led to this decision.

The Ryan White CARE Act will expire on September 30, 2005. The CARE Act is the largest source of dedicated funding for HIV/AIDS nationwide. Los Angeles County is the second largest epicenter of the AIDS epidemic in the United States, after New York City. An estimated 57,000 people now live with HIV/AIDS in Los Angeles County. Some 22,400 people living with HIV/AIDS received services funded with CARE Act dollars in 2003.

The CARE Act and HIV/AIDS funding are threatened as never before by an array of political forces, including an administration that has flat-funded most CARE Act programs for several years and across-the-board cuts in domestic funding due to budget deficits and the cost of the war in Iraq.

OAPP under Mr. Henry's leadership has played a central role advocating for the CARE Act and HIV/AIDS funding nationwide, as well in Los Angeles County. In its community letter, DHS credited Mr. Henry with increasing state and federal grants to Los Angeles County by 25 percent. Reauthorization of the CARE Act is the stated top priority for leading HIV/AIDS advocates nationwide. Locally, APLA and other organizations have been working closely with OAPP on CARE Act Reauthorization. The removal of Mr. Henry leaves the Los Angeles HIV/AIDS community with one less key voice to articulate its needs.

In his role as Director, Mr. Henry made many friends and perhaps an equal number of enemies. The timing of his removal raises questions about whether it was motivated by performance or politics.

DHS has been conducting an investigation into whether Mr. Henry used his office to campaign and fundraise on behalf of newly elected Mayor of Los



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Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa. At the same time, Mr. Henry's removal occurred as DHS released an audit of AIDS Healthcare Foundation's (AHF) hospice contracts with OAPP. The head of AHF, Michael Weinstein, has made his feelings about Mr. Henry known to the press and the Board of Supervisors on many occasions, and charges and countercharges about retaliation are unresolved. The Board of Supervisors has extended the contract on a month-to-month basis.

Providers and consumers of HIV/AIDS services in Los Angeles County deserve an honest accounting of the decision to remove Mr. Henry. DHS must dispel any suspicion that political pressure from the Board of Supervisors or community groups with large contracts at stake drove the dismissal.

APLA issues the following call to action to the Department of Health Services and the Board of Supervisors:

- DHS must hire an interim director immediately. Concurrently, it must conduct a fast-track national search for a new leader, with input from community partners/stakeholders.
- DHS must reaffirm OAPP's commitment to CARE Act Reauthorization to reassure community stakeholders that securing funding for services for Angelenos who need them will remain its top priority.
- DHS must provide an explanation of its report on Mr. Henry to remove any doubt a concerned constituency may harbor about the motivations for the dismissal.
- The Board of Supervisors must now hold AHF to the same standards it would any other HIV/AIDS organization by acting on the audit's conclusions. Only appropriate follow-through will dispel suspicions that the audit was a political exercise and a contributing factor to Mr. Henry's removal.

Without a response to these requests, DHS will have a hard time convincing the HIV/AIDS community that its interests are being well served at a crucial time.

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