



Dear Friends:

As of December 31, 2001, 467,910 Americans have died of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that between 700,000 and 900,000 people in the United States are currently infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS, representing approximately 1 in 350 Americans. At least 40,000 new infections occur each year. This crisis has already deprived this nation of some of its most talented creators and presenters of art--from dancers, choreographers, writers, actors, photographers and painters to arts patrons, administrators and members of their support staffs. None of us for whom the arts are important is spared the effects of AIDS.

It is important for all of us to recognize that many Americans are living with AIDS as part of their daily lives, whether they are afflicted themselves or know someone who is. The purpose of this letter is, therefore, two-fold: to recognize the tremendous loss of talent caused by this crisis and to encourage additional measures to help those who are living with AIDS.

Thirteen years ago, the National Endowment for the Arts (Endowment) joined with the United States Public Health Service in encouraging the dissemination of one of the most important tools in fighting HIV infection and AIDS: **information**. The Endowment continues to encourage and support the distribution of information about how HIV is and is not spread and how personal behavior can prevent transmission of the virus. The Endowment hopes that every citizen will show understanding and compassion to people whose lives have been blighted by this terrible disease.

Many arts organizations in this country have led the way in developing effective strategies to deal compassionately and humanely with employees who are living with AIDS or HIV. More important, they have blazed a trail in ensuring that the effects of this crisis in the arts community are recognized and understood by the public.

Each arts organization that is not already doing so could:

- Develop and publish a specific policy to enable your organization to deal fairly and compassionately with employees with life-threatening illnesses such as AIDS. For your convenience, we are including an example of such a policy.

Please remember: Federal regulations do not allow discrimination against employees with HIV infection or AIDS. CDC's Business Responds to AIDS/Labor Responds to AIDS (BRTA/LRTA) Resource Service can assist you in identifying educational materials to meet your workplace program needs, as well as providing referrals to local programs and services. You can call the service at 1-800-458-5231 or reach them through the Internet at <http://www.hivatwork.org>.

- Heighten public awareness about the AIDS and HIV crisis, and increase voluntary assistance on behalf of those who are ill. Your organization may choose, as over 8,000 arts organizations worldwide did on December 1, 2002, to observe *A Day With(out) Art*. In their observances, some organizations chose to remove a piece of art and leave in its place a statement about AIDS and why the piece was removed from public view. Other ways to make a statement about this crisis may be found from "curtain speeches" prior to a performance to earmarking all or a portion of proceeds for the direct benefit of those who are ill. *A Day With(out) Art* is observed on December 1st of every year on World AIDS Day.
- Use your local resources to get advice or assistance. Most arts organizations are located in or near a city or town in which a public clinic and AIDS "hotline" or other AIDS information groups can be easily found which will provide information, make speakers available, or offer other assistance. In addition, CDC's National Prevention Information Network (formerly the National AIDS Clearinghouse) can assist you in identifying local resources and services, as well as providing educational materials for your programs. You may call the toll-free number 1-800-458-5231, Monday through Friday, 9 am - 6 pm, eastern time. You can also reach them through the Internet at <http://www.cdcnpin.org>.
- Find out more about the many AIDS and Arts organizations across the country that offer information, assistance, and guidance. The Arts Endowment has compiled a list of such organizations that you may obtain by calling the Office for AccessAbility at (202) 682-5532 or by contacting your State Arts Agency's 504/ADA Coordinator. You may wish to participate in the activities of these organizations.

The Actors' Fund of America, with Endowment support, has established an Artists Health Insurance Resource Center on the Internet. Individuals or organizations in any artistic discipline seeking information about how to obtain health insurance can call the Actors' Fund at 212/221-7300 or reach them through the Internet at <http://www.actorsfund.org>.

The Arts Endowment has an AIDS Working Group that advises the agency on issues concerning the AIDS crisis and its effect on arts organizations and individual artists. I invite you to call the Office for AccessAbility at (202) 682-5532, Voice/T.T. [Text Telephone] (202) 682-5496, if you need information, have suggestions or comments, or have news about your own activities you would like to share.

Thank you.

Enclosures

Enclosure 1

Example of a Suggested "Personnel Policy"
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[Name of Organization]
[Date]

ASSISTING EMPLOYEES WITH LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESSES

[Name of Organization] recognizes that employees with life-threatening illnesses including, but not limited to cancer, heart disease and AIDS may wish to continue to engage in as many of their normal pursuits as their condition allows, including work. As long as these employees are able to meet acceptable performance standards, and medical evidence indicates that their conditions are not a threat to themselves or others, managers should be sensitive to their conditions and ensure that they are treated consistently with other employees. At the same time [Name of Organization] has an obligation to provide a safe work environment for all employees. Every precaution should be taken to ensure that an employee's condition does not present a health and/or safety threat to others.

Consistent with this concern for employees with life-threatening illnesses, [Name of Organization] offers the following range of resources:

- Management and employee education and information on terminal illness and specific life-threatening illnesses.
- Referral to agencies and organizations which offer supportive services for life-threatening illnesses.
- Benefit consultation to assist employees in effectively managing health, leave and other benefits.

GUIDELINES:

When dealing with situations involving employees with life-threatening illnesses, managers should:

1. Remember that an employee's health condition is personal and confidential, and reasonable precautions should be taken to protect information regarding an employee's health condition.

Enclosure 1 (continued)

2. Contact [Name of Designated Person or Office] if you believe that you or other employees need information about terminal illness, or a specific life-threatening illness, or if you need further guidance in managing a situation that involves an employee with a life-threatening illness.
3. Contact [Name of Designated Person or Office] if you have any concern about the possible contagious nature of an employee's illness.
4. Contact [Name of Designated Person or Office] to determine if a statement should be obtained from the employee's attending physician that continued presence at work will pose no threat to the employee or co-workers. [Name of Organization] reserves the right to require an examination by a medical doctor appointed by [Name of Organization].
5. If warranted, make reasonable accommodation for employees with life-threatening illnesses consistent with the needs of a particular division or unit of [Name of Organization].
6. Make a reasonable effort to reassign employees with life-threatening illnesses who are experiencing undue emotional stress and who request a reassignment to another division or unit of [Name of Organization].
7. Be sensitive and responsive to co-workers' concerns, and emphasize employee education available through [Name of Designated Person or Office].
8. No special consideration for reassignment requests from employees who feel threatened by a co-worker's life-threatening illness should be given beyond policies which would normally be followed for any employee requested reassignment.
9. Be sensitive to the fact that continued employment for an employee with a life-threatening illness may sometimes be therapeutically important in the remission or recovery process, or may help to prolong that employee's life.
10. Employees should be encouraged to seek assistance from established community support groups for medical treatment and counseling services. Information on these can be requested through [Name of Designated Person or Office].