

For Immediate Release

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More than 60 People Living With HIV, PLHIV Networks, and HIV/AIDS Leaders Call On AmfAR Board Chair Kenneth Cole to Step Down

Cite controversy around Cole's role in using AmfAR funds for Harvey Weinstein-linked venture and the risk of long-term damage to organization's vital work in AIDS research

Leaders call on NYS Attorney General Eric Schneiderman to ensure board leadership change and good governance

More than 60 people living with HIV (PLHIV), PLHIV networks and HIV/AIDS community leaders today called on Kenneth Cole to resign or be replaced as Board Chair of amfAR. Signees to the letter include people living with HIV/AIDS, advocates, former amfAR board members, non-profit groups, donor organizations and others. (See letter at [PLHIV Leadership Call on amfAR Board Chair to Step Down](#))

Those signing the letter include a number of nationally-recognized community leaders who are living with HIV, including **Peter Staley** (co-founder of the Treatment Action Group and former amfAR board member), **Naina Khanna** (executive director of the Positive Women's Network-USA), **Sean Strub** (founder of POZ), **Larry Kramer** (founder of ACT UP), **Tom Viola** (Executive Director of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS), **Cleve Jones** (founder of the Names Project/AIDS Memorial Quilt), **Venita Ray** (Texans Living with HIV Network), **Andrew Spieldenner, PhD** (US PLHIV Caucus Chair), **Larry Walker** (Thrive SS CEO), **Greg Louganis** (Olympic diver and LGBT activist).

Others individual signers include many state and local PLHIV leaders, as well as advocates and allies. Organizational signers include the four largest U.S.-based national PLHIV networks: the US People Living with HIV Caucus, Positive Women's Network USA, Sero Project and Thrive SS.

The letter cited Cole's actions – widely described in media reports – in pushing for a donation of AmfAR funds, over the written objections of amfAR's staff leadership, to a theatre project that provided financial benefits to disgraced movie producer Harvey Weinstein.

The leaders also call on New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman to exercise his appropriate legal oversight of NYS charities by ensuring that Cole step down or be removed as amfAR's Board Chair.

Signees to the letter stated that, "We, as people living with HIV, advocates, allies, funders, policy and service professionals, urge Kenneth Cole, and remaining board members who supported this inappropriate transaction, to resign from amfAR's Board of Trustees."

Long-time AIDS activist Peter Staley said that "Kenneth's complicity in Weinstein's unethical fundraising transactions, along with the resulting cover-up using forced non-disclosure agreements and Weinstein's selected law firm, risk doing real damage to amfAR's vitally important work in AIDS research and policy issues."

Staley, who served on amfAR's board from 1991 to 2004, added that "Kenneth has made valuable contributions to amfAR over the years. But this controversy and the ensuing extraordinary divisions within amfAR's board make it essential to turn the page and let amfAR's staff focus solely on its mission."

"amfAR's work is important but it is evident that the organization has strayed far from its grassroots origins. The interests of any one person, whether it is Harvey Weinstein, Ken Cole, or someone else, cannot take priority over and should not distract from the urgency of amfAR's mission," said Venita Ray, from the Texans Living With HIV Network.

Sean Strub, the founder of POZ Magazine and the executive director of the Sero Project, called on NYS Attorney General Schneiderman to step in and force Cole to be removed if he refuses to step down. "Mr. Schneiderman and his staff have the full authority to force a change in leadership. The AIDS community is asking him to fulfill his legal responsibilities and protect this important organization."