



John Snow, Inc. Urges Administration to Lift HIV Travel Ban

John Snow, Inc. opposes proposed regulations developed by the Bush administration's Department of Homeland Security that would increase the obstacles for people living with HIV to visit the United States.

The proposed new regulations, which would attach to existing travel restrictions, while purported to "ease" the present travel restriction are, in fact, more restrictive and create greater stigmatization of people living with HIV. In addition to disclosing their status to US government officials with limited or no training related to HIV disclosure, HIV-positive travelers must now also provide documentation that they are financially able to pay for any unanticipated healthcare needed during their visit, travel with all their required medications, make a commitment to adhere to these medications, and promise that they will not engage in any high-risk behavior while in the U.S. These requirements perpetuate a system which treats people living with HIV differently and with greater discrimination from other travelers wishing to come to the United States.

Since the travel ban is a long-standing federal law, JSI calls on the White House and Congress to abolish any and all travel restrictions entirely which single out people living with HIV. With China's recent commitment to drop its restrictive visa requirements, the United States remains one of the few countries that place onerous burdens on HIV-positive travelers. As an international public health consulting firm that works with the USG and local stakeholders to address HIV and reduce related stigma and discrimination, John Snow, Inc., strongly encourages Congress to enact the HIV Nondiscrimination in Travel and Immigration Act of 2007 and urges the President to sign the legislation.

Joel Lamstein, JSI president made the following statement regarding the proposed regulations:

"President Bush has demonstrated tremendous commitment to combating HIV through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). This commitment has given hope to millions and has provided people with resources necessary to address HIV in their community. The U.S. government's recent support to combat the pandemic has been laudatory and has put the President—and the United States—at the forefront of change. These new travel regulations, however, undermine that commitment.

"JSI is implementing several significant U.S. government-funded projects as part of the PEPFAR. To impose discriminatory restrictions now on people funded by the U.S. government to work on HIV simply because they are HIV-positive flies in the face of the work that the President has set out to do and the efforts PEPFAR has supported, including reducing HIV stigma. It is a serious violation of the human rights of those living with the virus.

"Furthermore, while U.S. citizens can and do travel to other countries for pleasure and business without restrictions, we should not erect discriminatory barriers against those from other countries for a chronic, treatable disease that is not casually spread. It's past

time for political decisions to be informed by the very science our own government has so appropriately supported."

Under the current regulations, it is possible for HIV-positive visitors to seek a "waiver" to the HIV ban, allowing them to visit the U.S. for up to 30 days. Such waivers are capriciously granted and difficult to obtain and the visitor's passport is permanently stamped to indicate that the bearer is HIV positive, a fact which for all intents and purposes becomes publicly disclosed. New regulations would require the visitor to demonstrate that he or she has no HIV symptoms, can supply evidence that the danger he or she poses to public health is minimal, and that he or she has an adequate supply of medication for the trip—even for persons who are not clinically eligible to be on ARVs. Under the current system and proposed regulations, such potential visitors must also prove that they have received comprehensive counseling about HIV transmission and harm reduction, and show that they have adequate funding to pay for any medical care they may require. Such stipulations are not placed on visitors with heart conditions, diabetes, or other chronic and costly medical conditions. The current law—and the proposed regulations—violate the human rights to freedom of movement, freedom from discrimination, and privacy.

“It is our belief that these proposed new regulations remain a serious violation of the human rights of those living with HIV,” commented Andrew Fullem, JSI’s Director for HIV and AIDS activities. “Not only is this policy an international embarrassment, it perpetuates on-going stigma and misunderstanding of the disease. The HIV travel ban is the sole reason that no international AIDS conferences have been held in the US for the last 16 years. It greatly hinders our efforts to forge collaborative relations with our field staff living with HIV. The visa process is burdensome and the cost of disclosure is often not seen as worth the benefit of coming to the United States.”

John Snow, Inc. urges Congress to oppose these new, discriminatory restrictions and overturn the existing travel restrictions by supporting Rep. Barbara Lee’s (D-CA) bill, the HIV Nondiscrimination in Travel and Immigration Act of 2007.

John Snow, Inc. (JSI) is dedicated to improving the health of individuals and communities in the United States and around the world. Headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, JSI provides an extensive range of research and consulting services to public health programs worldwide. Our mission is to work with clients to improve the quality of their operations. Through the design and implementation of policies, processes and systems, JSI improves efficiency and effectiveness. Learn more at www.jsi.com.