

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you are aware, HIV/AIDS is one of the most serious health crises that humanity has ever faced. Worldwide, three hundred people die every hour of every day from AIDS. Millions suffer with the disease, yet few in the developing world are able to afford the necessary medicines to protect their health and help to save their lives.

In your State of the Union Address of 2003, you promised to assist the nations of the developing world in providing urgently needed treatment to persons living with HIV/AIDS. As you stated then, "Anti-retroviral drugs can extend life for many years. And the cost of those drugs has dropped from \$12,000 a year to under \$300 a year—which places a tremendous possibility within our grasp. Ladies and gentlemen, seldom has history offered a greater opportunity to do so much for so many."

We are very concerned that this historic opportunity could be lost if we fail to take action to provide safe, effective, and affordable medications to the greatest number of people. The "tremendous possibilities within our grasp" of providing anti-retroviral drugs to those in need necessitates the use of the most economical and effective drugs, and therefore, safe generic medicines must be part of any effort to aid those in the developing world. We are very concerned over actions taken by your Administration to prohibit recipients of federal funds from purchasing generic medications—medications which would allow for treatment to the largest number of people and in turn, help to save the greatest number of lives.

We strongly urge you to reconsider this policy. Recipients of federal funds should be allowed to purchase safe generic medications that have been "pre-qualified" by the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO program for evaluating the safety and effectiveness of generic medications employs methods and standards that meet or exceed those used by respected regulatory agencies around the world, and we are unaware of any reason to question the WHO's findings.

We question the purpose behind the Administration's duplicative process being developed to review the safety and efficacy of generic drugs used to treat persons with HIV/AIDS. A duplication of the existing and effective WHO review procedure will needlessly

delay patients' access to these life-saving generic drugs. For millions of patients living with HIV/AIDS, treatment delayed is treatment denied, and they can not afford delays in receiving the medicines they need.

We should wait no longer to provide safe and effective low-cost medications to the developing world, and again, urge you to reconsider the Administration's actions. Make no mistake, delay will cost lives.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Bob Kennedy

John McCain

Russell D. Feingold

Dina Di

Amy Swann

P. L. Chafee