



AIDS group official resigns over gl

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AIDS group official resigns over gl acceptance of drug company fund

AIDS United communications director calls contributions 'glaring conflict of interest'

Published 3 years ago on August 27, 2019

By **Lou Chibbaro Jr.**



AIDS United

Kyle Murphy, the communications director for the national AIDS advocacy group AII released to a listserv of AIDS activists a letter informing AIDS United's president and other officials and staff members that he was resigning from his job because the group received large sums of money from pharmaceutical companies.

Murphy states in his Aug. 9 letter, a copy of which was obtained by the Washington B AIDS United is among nearly all of the nation's AIDS advocacy organizations that for have worked for the interests of people with HIV/AIDS who accept money from drug companies.

He said that although he does not think any of the groups and their leaders have com their basic principles and objectives for fighting AIDS, the widespread contributions l nation's largest pharmaceutical companies to AIDS organizations gives the appearan conflict of interest, even if no compromises have been made.

"This decision was not made lightly, and I hope that all of you will believe that the pr source of my anguish the last several months was the inspiration and kindness that I each of you," he said in his letter. "I am an AIDS United constituent. I am a gay man. living with HIV," he wrote.

"You are my heroes, and I have been so inspired by each and every one of you, and th end this epidemic," he said. "But when it all is said and done, the mission of our cons are what matter and we are not serving like we should," he states in his letter.

"Not out of some malevolence. But rather, our collective hearts wrote a check, that o budgets couldn't cash," his letter continues. "And so with the best of intentions and t sincere desire to be good partners with our colleagues in both the public and private have been slowly bought off. And most of us know it. We just aren't willing to say it," says in his letter.

As one example of a possible conflict of interest, Murphy points out how most AIDS organizations and the "vast majority" of the HIV community have become strong sup of the HIV prevention regimen known as PrEP in which the drug Truvada, manufactu pharmaceutical giant Gilead Sciences, is widely used and promoted.

"This support may or may not have been related to the sizeable donations that Gilead makes to almost every single HIV service provider, advocacy organization and patien group in the country," Murphy states in his letter. "But the mere fact that this potent glaring conflict of interest exists, should be enough to give all of us pause," he wrote.

"I cannot say that Gilead Sciences or any other pharmaceutical company has inappro influenced any decision that the leadership of AIDS United or any of its many partne:

made,” Murphy states in his letter. “But I do know that their status as a contributor is consideration when we decide how to respond to questions around drug pricing, PrEP and drug safety,” he wrote.

“And that alone is enough for me to decide that I can no longer work for an organization that has representatives from these companies on its board,” Murphy stated.

William McColl, AIDS United’s Vice President for Policy and Advocacy, sent an email to the listserv members who received Murphy’s letter, giving what he said was background information on some of the issues raised by Murphy.

“We greatly respect Kyle and wish him the best in his future,” McColl said in his message.

McColl noted that pharmaceutical company representatives have served on AIDS United’s board “dating back more than 30 years” and currently include representatives from Celgene Sciences and the pharmaceutical company ViiV Healthcare. He said approximately 24% of AIDS United’s fiscal year 2018-2019 budgets of more than \$16 million are funded by pharmaceutical companies.

“Virtually all of this funding supports grants directly to organizations supporting people with HIV,” McColl said in his message. “We seek to engage with funders (including pharmaceutical partners) precisely because it helps us to bring additional financial resources to the most difficult issues and underserved populations in the HIV epidemic; sometimes where funding might otherwise not be available,” he states in his email message.

“Our mission to end the HIV epidemic in the U.S. and serve our constituents is front and center with any decision we make as to an organization and we will consider opportunities with partner, including with pharmaceutical companies, where it advances this mission,” McColl said. “AIDS United has been and will continue to be transparent about the sources of its funding, which is publicly available information.”

Jesse Milan Jr., AIDS United’s president and CEO, told the Blade in a separate statement that the organization has included people on its board from a wide range of “stakeholders including funders.

“AIDS United engages with a wide spectrum of donors, including pharmaceutical funders to support our grant-making, policy and advocacy, and capacity building work,” Milan said.

“Their commitment makes much that we do possible, including funding many of our that support the work of hundreds of community organizations each year.”

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