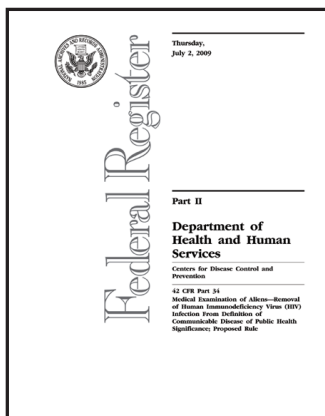


US Travel Ban Update



Placard at the Housing and HIV Research Summit



DHHS Federal Register Docket



Ruthann Tucker and Sean B. Rourke were two members of a delegation from the First North American Housing and HIV Research Summit to attend a meeting at the White House about the travel ban.

Progress in Ending the US Travel Ban for People with HIV

When the OHTN was making arrangements for members of the Canadian HIV/AIDS community to attend the First North American Housing and HIV Research Summit in Washington, DC in June 2009, it ran into problems with US travel restrictions.

Although the U.S. Congress repealed the 20-year legislation banning people with HIV from travelling to the United States in July 2008 – a year ago – the regulations were still in place. Summit organizers were told that a waiver would be issued, allowing people with HIV to attend the conference. Two weeks before the Summit, they were informed that the waiver system was no longer in effect and that Canadians with HIV who wanted to attend the Summit would have to apply for a special visa, which would require them to disclose their HIV status.

In response, the OHTN and the National AIDS Housing Coalition (NAHC), co-sponsor of the Summit, wrote letters to senior U.S. government officials. The OHTN also consulted with people with HIV across the country to determine whether to continue to support the Summit. The HIV/AIDS community overwhelmingly advised the OHTN to support the event, and use it to highlight the need to end the travel ban.

As a result of that effort, the U.S. government issued a special event designation allowing people with HIV to enter the U.S. to participate in the Summit – although this did not happen in time for people to organize their travel. Jeff Crowley, Special Advisor to the White House on HIV/AIDS, attended the Summit to listen to Canadians and their U.S. colleagues talk about the impact the travel ban has on them and to explain the process underway to end the travel ban. He also invited organizers of the North American Housing and HIV Research Summit, including the OHTN, National AIDS Housing Coalition, Housing Works, Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health and Human Rights Watch, to attend a meeting at the White House with officials from departments responsible for revising the regulations to discuss the effect of the travel ban on presenters and delegates attending the Summit.

Less than a month later – July 5, 2009 – the Department of Health and Human Services posted proposed changes to the regulations on the Federal Register. Members of the public have until August 17, 2009, to provide feedback on the proposed changes. NAHC is organizing a response on behalf of organizations in the U.S. involved in housing and HIV.

None of the Canadian participants attending the Summit were turned away from the U.S. border; however, three individuals chose not to attend the event either for health reasons or to protest the travel ban. Although the travel ban was not enforced, it is still crucial that the laws be changed. Said Dr. Sean B. Rourke, Scientific and Executive Director of the OHTN, "People living with HIV must be able to cross the border with dignity, like all other Canadians."

The end of the travel ban will also make it possible – once again – for organizations like UNAIDS to hold meetings in the United States.

The Department of Health and Human Services is accepting public feedback on the proposed changes to the [Federal Register](#) until August 17, 2009. Visit their [website](#) to submit a comment.

