

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 30, 2026

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
and Related Programs
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
and Related Programs
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Schatz:

We are writing with strong concerns regarding reports that U.S. Department of State's ("State") PEPFAR program is being used as an instrument of economic coercion by the Trump Administration. The Foreign, Operations, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee allocated **\$4.6 billion** for the Department of State's PEPFAR program to support lifesaving HIV prevention and care around the world in the Fiscal Year 2026 funding bill. Global investment in this critical program supports health systems and health workers, which makes America safer, stronger, and more prosperous, and we urge the Foreign, Operations, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to include language in its Fiscal Year 2027 funding bill that prevents the U.S. government from weaponizing U.S. health and development assistance to advance unrelated geopolitical Trump administration priorities.

Since President George W. Bush launched the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in 2003, PEPFAR has invested over \$100 billion in the global HIV/AIDS response, which has saved 25 million lives, prevented millions of HIV infections, and positioned the United States as the global leader in the HIV epidemic response.¹

However, we are alarmed by recent reports indicating that the State has proposed withholding U.S. funds appropriated for HIV treatment unless countries agree to certain unrelated demands. For example, State is allegedly considering withholding Congressionally appropriated foreign assistance funds to people with HIV in Zambia as a form of economic coercion, attempting to force Zambia to sign a more favorable critical minerals deal.² Additional reporting indicates that State has coerced at least twenty-four countries to sign new agreements in order to receive global health funds, including PEPFAR, with unattainable demands for countries with such a high debt-to-GDP ratio.³ This is especially concerning as recent reporting has shown a rise in AIDS cases in Zambia over the last year.⁴

¹ *About Us – PEPFAR*, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/about-us-pepfar> (2026)

² Stephanie Nolen, *U.S. Considers Withholding H.I.V. Aid Unless Zambia Expands Minerals Access*, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/16/health/zambia-hiv-aid-minerals-trump.html> (March 16, 2026)

³ Stephanie Nolen, *U.S. Cuts Health Aid and Ties It to Funding Pledges by African Governments*, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/15/health/health-agreements-us-africa.html> (January 15, 2026)

⁴ Stephanie Nolen, *AIDS Creeps Back in Parts of Zambia, a Year After U.S. Cuts to H.I.V. Assistance*, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/25/health/pepfar-hiv-aids-zambia.html> (April 25, 2026)

Following the illegal dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in early 2025 that led to stop-work orders among implementing partners, Congress reaffirmed the importance of PEPFAR in July 2025 by removing the program from the Republican rescission package.⁵

Considering the widespread bipartisan support this program has received for decades, and as recently as last year, we urge the Subcommittee to include language in its FY 27 funding bill that prevents the U.S. government from weaponizing U.S. health and development assistance to advance unrelated geopolitical goals because PEPFAR should not be used as a cudgel to coerce foreign governments. Continuation of this practice undermines U.S. strategic interests, impedes global health programs that aim to eradicate diseases which threaten Americans, and harms U.S. soft power.

The United States has a proud legacy of global leadership in the public health space. We hope the inclusion of language barring the use of PEPFAR funding for unrelated geopolitical negotiations will demonstrate to State officials, foreign service officers in the field, and locally-employed staff that the Trump administration's commercial interests must not come at the expense of saving lives.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



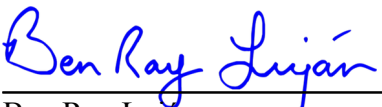
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator

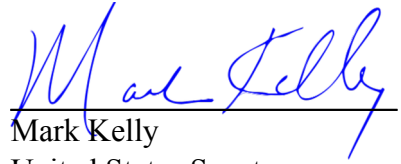


Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

⁵ See Scott Neuman, and Lexie Schapitl, *Congress rolls back \$9 billion in public media funding and foreign aid*, National Public Radio, <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/18/nx-s1-5469912/npr-congress-rescission-funding-trump> (July 18, 2025)



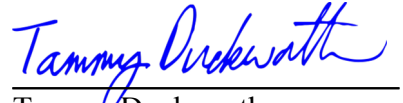
Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



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