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March 24, 2020

Dr. Stephen M. Hahn
Commissioner of Food and Drugs
U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
10903 New Hampshire Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20993-0002

Dear Commissioner Hahn:

I write to respectfully urge you to end the FDA's longstanding policy banning gay men from donating blood. This policy is outdated, discriminatory, and – in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis – detrimental to public health.

On March 19th, your colleagues at the FDA put out an urgent call for blood donations, which have been “dramatically reduced” during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Bill de Blasio said New York City has an urgent need for blood donations on March 22nd. Patients still need blood transfusions, platelets and plasma, but blood supplies are running low as frequent donors stay home to “flatten the curve.”

In New York City, there are hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who might be interested in donating blood, but are unable to because the FDA continues to treat gay men like second-class citizens. As New York's only openly gay Senator, this is a personal issue for me: my husband and I would like to help our community by donating blood – yet your agency refuses to let us do so.

This policy unnecessarily reduces the blood supply. According to a 2014 UCLA study, allowing gay men to donate blood would lead to a 4% increase in the blood supply – that's roughly 615,300 additional blood donations. The FDA claims each blood donation saves three lives, meaning that gay men donating blood could save more than 1 million lives.

There is no evidence that this policy makes the blood supply safer. The FDA's existing policies for screening and testing blood donations virtually eliminate the likelihood of HIV entering the blood pool. The Nucleic Acid Test (NAT), which the FDA currently uses, detects HIV in donated blood with a high degree of accuracy. In fact, the FDA

estimates the risk of HIV infection from blood screened by NAT is only 1 in 1.47 million. After the FDA slightly relaxed the ban on gay blood donors changed in 2015, the low risk of HIV infection did not change at all.

Lifting the ban would put the United States in line with best practices internationally. Countries such as South Africa, Mexico, Italy and Argentina are able to maintain a safe, stable blood supply while allowing gay men to donate blood. Maintaining this ban, even after it was slightly revised in 2015, puts the United States behind the international standard.

During the COVID-19 public health crisis, we shouldn't let stigma prevent patients from getting the blood they need. I urge the FDA to reconsider the ban on gay men donating blood.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad Hoylman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brad Hoylman
New York State Senate
27th Senate District