

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## In Wake of Federal Funding Threats, 'HIV Speaks' SC Event Pivots to Strategy & Community Power-Building Day

Columbia, SC — In response to looming federal budget cuts that threaten HIV care and community health services, the North Carolina AIDS Action Network (NCAAN) has shifted its upcoming HIV Speaks on Gervais Street event to a Strategy & Planning Day focused on advocacy training and long-term movement building across South Carolina.

The event will be held on Tuesday, May 6, 2025 at Brookland Banquet & Conference Center (1066 Sunset Blvd, West Columbia, SC). Doors open at 8:30 AM and programming runs through 3:30 PM.

Originally planned as a direct advocacy day at the South Carolina State House, this inaugural HIV Speaks gathering in the Palmetto State has pivoted in response to the extreme cuts outlined in the proposed 2026 federal budget. These cuts threaten HIV prevention programs, Medicaid, and funding that supports LGBTQ+ communities and harm reduction services.

"We made this shift not out of fear, but out of love for our communities, our future, and our right to live healthy, dignified lives," said Veleria M. Levy, Executive Director of NCAAN. "This is a moment that calls for us to be strategic, grounded, and united. While we may not walk into the State House this time, we are building the power to transform every town hall, every church gathering, and every neighborhood conversation across South Carolina."

The updated event will include:

- Advocacy 101 training for individuals and organizations
- Storytelling workshops for people living with HIV, LGBTQ+ individuals, and allies
- Overview of the 1115 Medicaid waiver impacting incarcerated populations
- Education on HIV criminalization and decriminalization reform in South Carolina
- Strategic planning for year-round engagement, including town halls and local action
- **Featured partners and speakers** include SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center; Phil Ford of the Ford & Ford Group; Jay Parmley, Executive Director of the South Carolina Democratic Party; PALLS (Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services); Southern AIDS Coalition; Latinos in the South; and ViiV Healthcare, which will present *Project Disrupt: Makers of the Movement*.

Community organizations, 501(c)(3) nonprofits, faith leaders, students, and concerned residents are all encouraged to attend. Light breakfast and lunch will be provided, and transportation support is available.

"The truth is, the cavalry isn't coming. We are the ones we've been waiting for," Levy added. "This is just the beginning. We are planting seeds, building strategy, and preparing to show up louder, smarter, and stronger than ever before."

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**About NCAAN:**

The North Carolina AIDS Action Network is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of people living with HIV and viral hepatitis through policy change, education, and community engagement. Now expanding across the Carolinas, NCAAN builds bridges between communities and lawmakers to fight stigma and promote health equity.

**Media inquiries and interview requests should be directed to Veleria M. Levy at [veleria@ncaan.org](mailto:veleria@ncaan.org).**