

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 9, 2022

The Honorable Rachel L. Levine, MD
Assistant Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Admiral Levine,

We write to request your support for the designation of September 9th as “National African Immigrant and Refugee HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Awareness (NAIRHHA) Day.” As you may be aware, the number of African immigrants and refugees living in the United States has doubled every decade since 1970, reaching more than two million in 2018, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. HIV infection rates are six times higher in the African immigrant population than in that of the U.S. as a whole and are nearly twice those of U.S.-born Black individuals. Additionally, African immigrants face the highest average chronic hepatitis B rates in the country, with approximately 10 percent of people in these communities living with hepatitis B. The CDC recommends that individuals born in Africa, or individuals born in the U.S. who have at least one parent born in Africa, who were not vaccinated at birth, should be prioritized for hepatitis B testing.

Despite these recommendations and high disease burden, African immigrant communities face significant challenges to HIV and viral hepatitis testing, diagnosis, care, and treatment. Challenges include stigma, fear, lack of awareness and knowledge, language barriers, immigration status, social and economic marginalization, and limited access to health care services. Often, care is inaccessible due to language and cultural barriers. Given that HIV and hepatitis B and C are preventable and treatable conditions, we believe that, with appropriate attention and focus, health outcomes among African immigrant communities can be improved and lives can be saved.

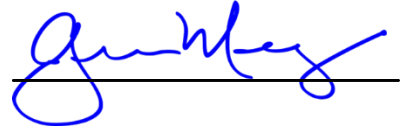
Federal recognition of NAIRHHA Day will bring increased awareness and attention to the health issues of HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis in African immigrant and refugee populations in the U.S. NAIRHHA Day will help to eliminate the pervasive stigma surrounding HIV and hepatitis in these communities by encouraging screenings, treatment, and hepatitis B vaccination. No existing HIV/AIDS awareness day addresses the distinct factors influencing the high rates of HIV and viral hepatitis among African immigrants and refugees.

We appreciate your consideration of this important issue and look forward to working with you as we continue this effort to promote increased awareness, testing, prevention, and treatment of viral hepatitis and HIV/AIDS among African immigrant and refugee communities in the U.S. It is time for us to recognize NAIRHHA Day.

Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



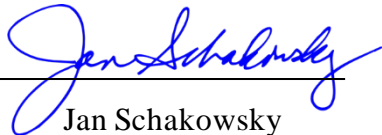
David N. Cicilline
Member of
Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress



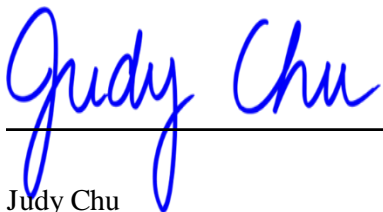
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



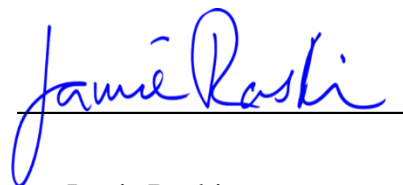
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

