

Trump administration dismisses remaining members of HIV/AIDS council

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This week, the Trump administration dismissed the remaining members of the Presidential Advisory Council on [HIV/AIDS](#) amid plans to appoint new members in the coming year.

Current members, appointed by the Obama administration, were sent letters on Wednesday informing them that their time on the council ended, and were told they are eligible to reapply for their spot on the council according to the Department of Health and Human Services. Some 25 members can be commissioned for the council, also known as "PACHA", but as November only 10 members were listed on the council's website.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) posted a notice for nominations to the council on the Federal Register at the beginning of December indicating the administration's desire to continue the advisory board but with a fresh slate of experts.

Made up of health policy leaders with expertise in HIV and AIDS and public health, the council's members provide recommendations on programs and policies related to HIV and AIDS to the White House and the Secretary of Health and

Human Services. Over 1 million people in the United States are living with HIV, with the most vulnerable populations being gay and bisexual men, particularly African American gay and bisexual men, according to HHS.

Kaye Hayes, the executive director of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, confirmed the dismissals, but clarified that every administration goes through a process of appointing new members.

“On December 27, 2017, the current members of Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) received a letter informing them that the Administration was terminating their appointments. They were also thanked for their leadership, dedication and commitment to the effort,” Hayes said in a statement to ABC News.

“Changing the makeup of federal advisory committee members is a common occurrence during Administration changes. The Obama Administration dismissed the George W. Bush Administration appointees to PACHA in order to bring in new voices. All PACHA members are eligible to apply to serve on the new council that will be convened in 2018.”

Prominent activists in the LGBTQ community have been critical of the Trump administration’s positions towards the issue of HIV and AIDS and say these terminations are an example of the Trump White House’s policies.

Earlier this summer, six members of the council quit in protest to what they viewed was inaction by the Trump administration on policies towards HIV and AIDS.

A White House spokesman did not immediately respond to ABC News' request for comment on the dismissals or the resignations earlier this year.

The Trump administration has been publicly supportive of efforts to combat the HIV and AIDS epidemic, releasing public statements on National HIV Testing Day and on World AIDS Day.

“While we have made considerable progress in recent decades, tens of thousands of Americans are infected with HIV every year. My Administration will continue to invest in testing initiatives to help people who are unaware they are living with HIV learn their status,” said [President Trump](#) in a World AIDS Day proclamation.

But [gay rights](#) advocates say the Trump administration has been discriminatory in a subtle way, leaving out any reference to the LGBTQ community from their statements.

“In his first year in office, Trump has made a continuous effort to erase LGBTQ

people and people living with HIV from the fabric of our country - actions that fly in the face of American values and that all fair-minded Americans will continue to push back against in the new year," [tweeted](#) Sarah Kate Ellis, the president and CEO of [GLAAD](#), a gay rights advocacy group.

Nicholas Carlisle, the executive director of the Southern AIDS Coalition, and a former member of the council who received a dismissal letter, told ABC News while he is disappointed he understands the dismissals.

"I'm a little disappointed that we got the letter over the holidays and it was a little unceremonious with very little time to re-nominate for the upcoming appointments so that was disappointing," Carlisle said. "But HIV is a bipartisan issue and we want to work with this administration just like we worked with the last administration and we wish the future PACHA members well."

Nominations for membership to the Presidential Advisory Council must be received by Jan. 2, according to the Federal Register, but it is unclear when new appointments will be made.

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