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**THOUSANDS RALLY AT AIDS WALK SAN FRANCISCO TO
PROTECT AND EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE JUST DAYS
AHEAD OF CRUCIAL SENATE VOTE**

Mayor Ed Lee, Supervisor Jeff Sheehy, and leaders of Positive Resource Center, Project Open Hand, and UCSF's Ward 86 call for defeat of the bill

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – About 10,000 participants gathered in Golden Gate Park at this Sunday's AIDS Walk San Francisco (AWSF), both in support of the people living with HIV/AIDS, and to rally against the Senate healthcare bill, coming up for a vote in the coming days or weeks. If passed, the legislation would throw millions of people with HIV and other pre-existing conditions off their insurance. Crowd size swelled this year, with a larger turnout than in 2016, in response to the urgency of this year's event.

Walkers raised approximately \$2 million this year in support of **Positive Resource Center**, **Project Open Hand**, and **Ward 86's Golden Compass Program**, which provides specialized medical care for older people living with HIV/AIDS.

Project Inform, **Health Access California**, and the long-term HIV survivor group **Let's Kick AIDS Survivor Syndrome** led a sign-making and rally effort as people gathered in Sharon Meadow before the Walk. Participants customized hundreds of signs available at the event, conveying their commitment to affordable healthcare for those living with pre-existing conditions, and displayed them while they walked the 10 kilometers through Golden Gate Park. The addition of Health Access California marked the first time a public health advocacy organization not directly related to HIV took part in AIDS Walk San Francisco.

"Thank you everyone for coming together today," said **Mayor Ed Lee**. "Let's get to zero deaths, zero new cases, and zero stigma."

"It is so important for us to band together to fight what is happening in Washington," said **Brett Andrews**, CEO of Positive Resource Center. "To all of you walkers here today, I thank you for heeding the call and rising up to resist the threat we face in the potential dismantling of our healthcare."

“We started the Golden Compass program, which is made possible by AIDS Walk San Francisco, to holistically manage all the healthcare conditions that may come around in people living with HIV who are older than 50,” said **Dr. Monica Gandhi**, Medical Director of UCSF’s Ward 86 at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital. “I never thought suffering and the human condition would be called a pre-existing condition. But we are all part of the human condition and we are *all* together in this.”

“When you walk with us, remember that we stand up for our people. We fight for the rights – and the food – of everyone in need,” said **Mark Ryle**, CEO of Project Open Hand. “And we’re not going away, no matter who’s in the White House.”

“It is incredibly humbling to serve as one of the stewards of this great San Francisco event and tradition,” said **Serafina Palandech**, Board Chair of the AIDS Walk San Francisco Foundation, the organization that oversees the annual event. “There are other AIDS Walks in other cities, but the San Francisco Walk is as special as the city itself – where people who don’t express their beliefs are the minority, and where AIDS was first treated as an emergency when so many in others chose to bury their heads in the sand.”

“It is quite a dichotomy to be here today with all of you, thousands of people who are working so hard to make the San Francisco Bay Area’s response to HIV even stronger,” said AIDS Walk Founder and Senior Organizer, **Craig Miller**, “while elected leaders in Washington are aiming to make it so that fewer people are able to access the care that they need. It’s outrageous and we’re not going to put up with it.”

Celebrities at the Opening Ceremony included Grammy Award-winning singer **Estelle**, **Frenchie Davis** (*The Voice*), **Carson Kressley** (*RuPaul’s Drag Race*), actor and comedian **Hal Sparks**, and the cast of *Ain’t Too Proud - The Temptations* musical. ABC-7 News Anchor **Dan Ashley** co-hosted the Opening Ceremony.

In addition to Mayor Lee, other elected officials in attendance included California State Senator **Scott Weiner**, San Francisco Supervisors **Mike Farrell**, **Sandra Lee Fewer**, and **Jeff Sheehy**, San Mateo County Supervisor **David J. Canepa**, and Alameda Mayor **Trish Spencer**.

A Post-Walk Show was held for participants, who filled the meadow after completing the Walk to see special performances by **Estelle**, **Frenchie Davis**, **PUSH** and *RuPaul’s Drag Race* stars **ChiChi DeVayne**, **Delta Work**, **Ginger Minj**, **Manila Luzon**, and **Peppermint**. **Carson Kressley** hosted.

Since 1987, AWSF has raised \$90 million for dozens of Bay Area HIV/AIDS service organizations and has long been Northern California’s largest AIDS fundraising event.

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About the AIDS Walk San Francisco Foundation: The AIDS Walk San Francisco Foundation is the governing body of AIDS Walk San Francisco. It is composed of a Board of Directors intimately familiar with the Walk and the communities it serves. The Board oversees the event's production and finances as well as determines how the event's net proceeds are distributed. Beneficiaries of each year's AIDS Walk are determined by the Board well in advance of the event to ensure an informed community of participants and donors.

About AIDS Walk San Francisco: Since 1987, AIDS Walk San Francisco has raised \$90 million for lifesaving HIV prevention, testing, and care programs and services, and has grown into the largest AIDS fundraising event in Northern California. AIDS Walk San Francisco has become a Bay Area tradition, bringing together tens of thousands of participants and volunteers; hundreds of corporate, community, and friends and family teams; and hundreds of thousands of donors from the Bay Area and across the country. AIDS Walk San Francisco is a project of the AIDS Walk San Francisco Foundation. This year's event benefits [Positive Resource Center](#), [Project Open Hand](#), [UCSF's Ward 86](#), and many other Bay Area AIDS service organizations. For more information, visit sf.aidswalk.net.

About MZA Events: AIDS Walk San Francisco was founded in 1987 by Craig R. Miller and his organization of activists, MZA Events. Miller is the AIDS Walk originator and has produced hundreds of public service campaigns and fundraising events, generating more than \$400 million for major AIDS organizations throughout the country. For more information, please visit www.mzaevents.com.