

**Testimony of  
Sir Elton John  
Testimony Before the  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Hearing on  
Global AIDS  
April 11, 2002**

**Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee:**

I've worn many hats in my career ... but the hat of a policymaker is not one of them. I will not take up your time to tell you facts and numbers you already know. Instead, I will tell you how I feel.

Twelve years ago last Monday, our friend Ryan White died of AIDS. We were completely devastated – his mother, Jeanne, most of all. Senator Kennedy, shortly after Ryan died, you called his mom and you asked her to come to Washington to help pass the Ryan White Care Act. Initially, she said no. Ryan was the spokesperson. She couldn't do that. But she did.

The month Ryan died, this committee passed the Ryan White Care Act that dramatically increased funding for care and treatment of people with AIDS. Mr. Chairman: the rest of the world looks at this legislation as a sign of what America can do for its people. We are here today to explore what America can do for the world.

Ryan White was not the first friend of mine to die from AIDS, and he wasn't the last -- but he taught me the most. People shut him out of school; they shot bullets into his home; they spread lies and slander about him. But Ryan didn't hate them. He forgave them. He knew they were uninformed and afraid. He was troubled though, when he gained so much sympathy for having AIDS – because he knew it was based on a distinction between people with AIDS who are innocent and people with AIDS who are not. He completely rejected that distinction.

Over the last ten years, through the Elton John AIDS Foundation, I have tried to do as much as I can, with the money I have, to make a difference. Since 1992, we have spent more than \$30 million, in 55 countries, trying to eliminate prejudice against people with HIV/AIDS, trying to educate people about how to prevent AIDS, and trying to provide service and support to people living with AIDS and children orphaned by AIDS.

Our first grant in Africa went to The AIDS Support Organization in Uganda, which is now a model of excellence for community based programs across the continent. I am delighted Noerine Kaleeba is here to tell you about it. Our Foundation has increased access to HIV/STD education and prevention services for 50,000 women in slum areas of Sao Paulo, Brazil – a program so successful the Brazilian government is putting up the money to double it. We are funding the Living With AIDS project in Thailand where home-based care, counseling and training encourage villages to support, not shun, friends, relatives and neighbors living with AIDS.

We are reaching women in India with reliable information, affordable condoms and medical care, along with counseling about alternative job opportunities.

We have also established an AIDS Hospice in Soweto – the only project in South Africa providing inpatient Care, Day Care, Outpatient Care, Home Care and Education and Training. Among people with AIDS, the greatest fear is not fear of dying, but fear of dying alone. At our hospice, no one dies alone. We are very proud of that.

But, Mr. Chairman, our hospice in South Africa has *eight* beds, and the nation has more than 4 million people infected with HIV. We are doing everything we can with what we have, and we have comforted many people and saved many lives. But we have done nearly enough. The people out on the front lines fighting this disease need reinforcements, and they need them now.

That means more funding for education and prevention; more funding for voluntary testing and counseling, more funding for care of people with AIDS, and more funding for orphans. And it emphatically means more access to treatment. People with lives to lead, and work to do, and children to raise must not be left to die just because they're poor.

Senator Helm's op-ed called for anti-retroviral therapy to help stop HIV-positive mothers from transmitting the virus to their babies is an important first step. But we need to take the second step. We need to treat the mother. If we don't treat her – who will take care of her baby? What if that baby comes to sit here in the Senate ten years from now and says: "Thank you for giving my mother the medicine that helped saved my life, but why couldn't you give her the medicine that would help save *her* life? Did you keep me alive just so I could bear the agony of burying my mother?"

The drug companies are the only organizations in the world whose resources can rival those of rich governments in battling this disease. But, in my view, they have broken a public trust. They can't expect to keep pulling in profits, have their research subsidized, and then go missing in the midst of a world-wide health emergency. They can't keep telling us they're in the business of saving lives, if they always put business ahead of saving lives. We need them – and everyone as partners

Mr. Chairman: it's late, but it is not too late. If we all step up now with a full commitment to fight AIDS, they can still have a heroic role in ending this epidemic. None have us have done all we could have done or should have done in this fight.

Mr. Chairman: Ninety-five percent of new infections come in poor countries. They do not have the resources to defeat it. They desperately need your help. No nation, corporation, foundation or individual has the money you have. No one even comes close. This is the government of the richest nation in history, and I'm here asking you for more money to stop the worst epidemic in history. I am no student of government, but I understand there are two ends to Pennsylvania Avenue, and this end controls the money. The President can't sign what you don't pass.

If the world is going to make a significant, decisive intervention to change the course of this pandemic, it's going to have to start here. And it might as well start now. When Ryan White was asked by a reporter if he had a message for medical researchers working on AIDS, he said: "Hurry up." We all need to hurry up. Every day we delay, we lose more lives, and we lose a little more of our own humanity.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: We have one thing in common – you and I. We have all been on stage and heard the cheers of the crowd. In my line of work, if you really don't want it to end, you can even keep it going for a few more encores -- but soon enough the lights go up, the crowd files out, and we all go home -- and in that silence we're left to ask ourselves whether what we do makes a difference.

When our lives are done, won't we want it to be said that we saw millions of people suffering with disease, millions more at risk, millions more abandoned, a whole continent in danger of dying, and we refused to let it happen. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: The United States Government is the biggest possible source of new funding for fighting AIDS. Forty million people are infected with HIV. Eight thousand people are dying every day. You have the power to end this epidemic. Please end it.

It's true that one nation cannot defeat AIDS in 200 nations. But two hundred nations cannot defeat AIDS without the help of one. *This* one. If the US does little, other nations will see in that an excuse to do little. If the United States does a lot, other nations will do a lot, because they will see in your resolve a new hope of victory. When the United States fights, it wins.

**Mr. Chairman: what America has done for its people has made America strong. What America has done for others has made America great. I pray that defeating AIDS will be one more great victory.**

**Thank you very much.**