



## “We are deeply troubled . . .”

February 25, 1999

General Barry McCaffrey, *Director*  
Office of National Drug Control Policy, Washington, D.C.

Dear General McCaffrey,

As academics, journalists, public health experts, and community leaders, we are deeply troubled by a series of inaccurate and misleading statements you have made as Drug Czar.

In particular, we are concerned by statements you have made on the following:

### • NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

In March 1998, you described needle exchange programs as “magnets for all social ills,” including violence, drug dealers and prostitution. Yet in study after study, scientific researchers have found that needle exchanges reduce the transmission of HIV without increasing drug use.

Also, in April, you claimed that two Canadian needle exchange studies showed that needle exchanges were ineffective in reducing the spread of HIV and may have worsened the problem. Missing for your analysis was the fact that Canada, unlike the United States, allows needles to be purchased without a prescription and as a result, the Canadian study did not include more affluent and healthier addicts who were less likely to engage in the riskiest activities.

Your statements so disturbed the Canadian scientists that they felt compelled to publish an op-ed in The New York Times to repudiate the misuse of their findings.

### • MEDICAL MARIJUANA

On August 15, 1996, you said, “There is not a shred of scientific evidence that shows that smoked marijuana is useful or needed. This is not medicine. This is a cruel hoax.”

Yet exhaustive research, including numerous studies by the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other authoritative institutions, have concluded that marijuana possesses therapeutic value and effectively treats chemotherapy-related nausea and appetite loss.

Even after the New England Journal of Medicine, which represents the mainstream medical community, editorialized in support of medical marijuana, you have made no statements recognizing the scientific research backing the medical value of marijuana.

### • INTERNATIONAL MODELS OF DRUG CONTROL

On July 24, 1998, the Chicago Tribune quoted you as saying: “the Murder rate in Holland is double that in the United States . . . That’s drugs.”

In fact, the Dutch homicide rate is only one-fourth that of the United States. The Dutch rate has never approached, much less exceeded, that of the United States.

When you claimed that the Dutch murder rate was higher, you blamed Holland’s drug policies. Yet when confronted with the facts, you did not suggest that U.S. drug policies are the cause of our higher homicide rate.

The media and the public rely on your office to avoid unfounded speculation, to recognize and disseminate scientific consensus when it exists, and to provide, when available, material facts that could help us deal realistically and effectively with our very real problems of addiction. Therefore, we urge you and other national leaders to provide the news media and the public with the most accurate scientific findings available.

We realize that speaking forthrightly requires leadership and courage in the current ideological atmosphere, but, given your distinguished record in the military, the public has reason to expect nothing less.

Respectfully,

• **Regina Aragón**, Public Policy Director, SF AIDS Foundation; • **Dr. James T. Black**, President, 100 Black Men of Los Angeles; • **Willie L. Brown Jr.**, Mayor of San Francisco; • **Pat Christen**, Executive Director, SF AIDS Foundation; • **Dennis deLeon**, Executive Director, Latino Commission on AIDS; • **Dr. David Duncan**, Clinical Associate Professor, Brown University Medical School, and Chair, Council on Illicit Drugs, National Association for Public Health Policy; • **Dr. Joycelyn Elders**, Professor of Endocrinology, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, former Surgeon General; • **Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr.**, Chair of Afro-American Studies, Harvard University; • **Ira Glasser**, Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union; • **Ronald E Hampton**, Executive Director, National Black Police Association; • **Dr. Patricia D. Hawkins**, Associate Executive Director, Whitman-Walker Clinic; • **Rebecca Issacs**, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; • **Rob Kampia**, Public Policy Director, Marijuana Policy Project; • **Glenn C. Loury**, Director, The Institute on Race and Social Division; • **Lupe Lopez**, Executive Director, People of Color Against AIDS Network; • **Luz Alvarez Martinez**, Executive Director, National Latina Health Organization; • **Daniel MacCallair**, Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice; • **Dr. Ethan Nadelmann**, Executive Director, Lindesmith Center; • **Loras Ojeda**, Community Relations Director, Mobilization Against AIDS; • **Eva Patterson**, Executive Director, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights; • **Orlando Patterson**, Professor, Harvard University; • **Cynthia Pearson**, Executive Director, National Women’s Health Network; • **Duane Poe**, Executive Director, Black Coalition on AIDS, Inc.; • **Dr. Alvin Poussaint**, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry Harvard; • **Alvan Quamina**, Executive Director, African American AIDS Support Services and Survival Institute; • **Ron Rowell**, MPH, Executive Director, National Native American AIDS Prevention Center; • **Kathleen Stoll**, Center for Women’s Policy Studies; • **Craig E. Thompson**, Executive Director, AIDS Project - Los Angeles; • **Trish Moylan Torruella**, Executive Director, Mothers’ Voices: United to End AIDS; • **Dr. Helen Rodriguez-Trias**, Co-Director, Pacific Institute of Women’s Health; • **Martin Waukazoo**, Executive Director, Native American Health Center; • **Margaret Batchelor White**, President, Black Women’s Agenda, Inc.; • **William Julius Wilson**, Professor, Harvard University; • **Kevin Zeese**, President, Common Sense for Drug Policy