



## **U.S. HIV/AIDS Travel Regulations Under Fire**

By [GayWebMonkey.com](http://GayWebMonkey.com)

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Washington, D.C. - Gay rights activists and Democratic lawmakers are crying foul over regulations proposed by the Homeland Security Department that could actually make it more difficult for persons living with HIV/AIDS to travel to the United States.

Under current federal law, travel and immigration to the U.S. by HIV-positive people is severely restricted. In fact, at present, foreigners with the HIV/AIDS virus can only obtain visas after receiving a waiver from the Homeland Security Department in an overly involved process that requires approval from DHS headquarters.

In response to this policy which has long been under attack by GLBT activists, the White House touted the new Homeland Security Department regulations as a tool that would make the process easier for HIV-positive people seeking 30-day stays in the United States. In fact, President Bush himself observed on World AIDS Day that the regulations were meant to speed up the process.

However organizations including Lambda Legal and politicians including Sen. Ted Kennedy disagree with the Bush administration's assertions about the new regulations.

According to an AP report, Bebe Anderson, HIV project director at the gay civil rights group Lambda Legal, described the rules as "inappropriate based on medicine and public health concerns." Meanwhile, in the same report, Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., said that the proposal "offers little of value to HIV-positive applicants."

"It imposes strict requirements that unfairly limit travel to the United States," Kennedy went on to say after chairing a Senate health committee hearing on the Bush administration's international AIDS efforts. "It is mired in the past, a past where people feared HIV as a contagious disease that could not be controlled or effectively managed."

Further, in a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, more than two dozen Democratic House members objected that the changes don't lessen the burden on HIV-positive people, but instead shifted authority to "local consular officers who may lack the appropriate medical expertise."

"There would be no appeal process," said the letter released Monday by Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif. "Selecting this pathway would also require applicants to waive any right to readjust their status once in the United States — a waiver not required under current policy."

In response Rep. Lee has introduced legislation supported by Lambda Legal and other gay rights group that would overturn the ban.

For its part Homeland Security Spokeswoman Veronica Valdes defended the new rule arguing that it provides a streamlined process for HIV-positive visitors. Meanwhile with respect to Lee's letter Valdes had no immediate response, but said the department would review it, according to the Associated Press.

*Written By Duane Wells*