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Simon & Schuster, Inc.
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New York, NY 10020

March 20, 2023

To the attention of Jonathan Karp, President and Chief Executive Officer of Simon & Schuster,

As a robust and comprehensive coalition of HIV/AIDS advocates, organizations, and public health experts, we are writing to you with an urgent concern. Simon & Schuster (by subsidiary Skyhorse) has plans to distribute a book called, [The Real AIDS Epidemic: How the Tragic HIV Mistake Threatens Us All](#) by recognized AIDS denialist Rebecca Culshaw on March 28, 2023. In the midst of coexisting pandemics and public health outbreaks, we know the dire and deadly consequences of spreading misinformation and denialism. It is disappointing that a book like Culshaw's is on a roster of your releases in 2023, but you still have a chance to reverse this decision. We are asking you to reconsider this book deal and stop its distribution.

The thesis of Culshaw's book is that HIV does not conclusively cause AIDS, but that this was a 'mistake' made in the 1980s and never amended or corrected. To the contrary, that HIV causes AIDS was demonstrated first in the 1980s, when the virus was discovered, and subsequently research has only strengthened that causal link in the subsequent decades, including via in vitro systems, in animal models, including non-human primates, via molecular phylogenetics, and in human samples.

Research has shown conclusively that misinformation and denialism do material harm to HIV/AIDS prevention, testing, and treatment. For example, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved oral PrEP over a decade ago in 2012. However, this drug, which is 99 percent effective in preventing HIV, has been woefully underutilized, especially in the communities that would benefit from it the most. While 67 percent of white people recommended for PrEP have access to the drug, astonishingly, only 8 percent of Black people eligible – who also disproportionately make up a majority of new HIV transmissions – are currently using the medication. **With new prevention tools on the market, as well as revolutionary treatment options (people living with HIV who are on effective medication with their HIV viral load undetectable cannot transmit HIV to their sexual partners, known as undetectable = untransmittable, or U=U), misinformation which helps exacerbate stigma, discrimination, and medical distrust should not be an added barrier to accessing lifesaving drugs.**

Furthermore, [research has shown](#) that AIDS denialism poses real health risk to people living with HIV and their sexual partners. We know that patients who fall into AIDS denialism are more likely to experience HIV-related symptoms of illness and have higher, detectable viral loads, meaning the virus ([which is real](#)) can be transmitted to their sexual partners. By releasing an AIDS denialist book, Simon & Schuster would be encouraging vulnerable people to ignore medical directions and to stop their medications, which is dangerous to their health and is likely to lead to a higher amount of virus in their bodies.

In late 2019, weeks prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic which is still [disproportionately deadly](#) to people living with HIV, [HIV/AIDS advocates raised the alarm about inaccurate Truvada lawsuit ads promoted on social media](#) and allowed by platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. In response, [advocates penned a letter to Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook executives](#) to take down the ads knowing that they would heighten fears about taking PrEP. Since then, Facebook has taken down a majority—if not all—anti-PrEP ads. Now Simon & Schuster faces the time and obligation to do the same.

Rebecca Culshaw's book *Science Sold Out: Does HIV Really Cause AIDS?* tipped off veteran HIV/AIDS advocates and leading doctors in the infectious disease space back in 2007. Dr. Kenneth Whitaker Witwer of Johns Hopkins Medicine and Dr. Ruy Ribeiro of University of New Mexico break down Culshaw's "egregious errors" [in this four-page critique](#). They both also co-authored [this critical response](#) of her paper titled *Mathematical Modeling of AIDS Progression: Limitations, Expectations, and Future Directions* in 2006. Advocates time and time again have tried to warn educators and publishers the dangers of platforming someone like Rebecca Culshaw. It is important that Simon & Schuster apply this thorough and science-backed guidance and put an end to the distribution of Culshaw's HIV/AIDS denialism and misinformation.

The co-signatories of this letter demand that:

- Simon & Schuster immediately end plans for distribution of the book, *The Real AIDS Epidemic: How the Tragic HIV Mistake Threatens Us All* by Rebecca Culshaw.
- Simon & Schuster reassess other future releases to ensure that other books won't assist similar damage to public health.
- Simon & Schuster create a public health working group to assure community members that this will not happen again.

As a major publishing house, Simon & Schuster has a duty to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS misinformation and denialism. Every occurrence adds needless life to an epidemic that has persisted for far too long. These concerns listed from HIV/AIDS advocates, organizations, and public health experts must be prioritized and taken seriously by Simon & Schuster.

Signed,

Organizations:

above/ground press
Act Now: End AIDS (ANEA)
Coalition
ACT UP London
ACT UP NY
ADAP Advocacy Association
African Services Committee
Albany Damien Center
All Kinds Accessibility
Consulting
Arsenal Pulp Press
AVAC
Botton, Ink.
Cascade AIDS Project
Community Access National
Network
Crip News
CRISPR for Cure
Collaboratory
Dibby Theatre
Disability in Publishing
ElderPride Inc.
Familia:TQLM
FATCAMP Party Collective
Fonograf Editions
Foundation for Integrative
AIDS Research (FIAR)
GLAAD
GMHC
Hacking//Hustling
Health GAP (Global Access
Project)
Health Justice
Het HEM
HIV and Aging Research
Project | Palm Springs
HIVForum.info
Indivisible Activate NYC

Housing Works
iHealth
JournalsAndBooks.com, Inc.
Jug Run Press LLC
Kate Martin Therapy
Lambda Independent
Democrats of Brooklyn
LGBT Center of Greater
Cleveland
Long COVID Justice
Loyalty Bookstores
My Fabulous Disease
NAM aidsmap
New York City AIDS Memorial
One More Page Books
Pink Oracle
Plus Life Media
PlusInc
Positive Women's Network -
USA
PrEP4All
Queer Crime Writers
Queer Palestinian
Empowerment Network
Ragon Institute of Mass
Rizzoli International
Publications, Inc.
Seven Stories Press
General, MIT and Harvard
Strategies for High Impact
(S4HI)
Southern Tier AIDS
The Paperback Exchange
Bookstore
Program/Southern Tier Care
Coordination
The Well Project
Trans Equity Consulting
Treatment Action Group
(TAG)

U=U Plus
What Would an HIV Doula
Do?

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