

June 10, 2014

To the Honorable Mayor Terry Tornek  
and Honorable Council Members of the City of Pasadena  
100 North Garfield Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91109

Dear Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

I am a client of the Andrew Escajeda clinic ("Escajeda clinic") at the Pasadena Department of Public Health having been inflicted with the HIV virus. I am one of many utilizing the wonderful services that the compassionate, knowledgeable and hard working staff members of the Escajeda clinic provide.

I did volunteer work in Africa in the early 1990's working with doctors and nurses in remote villages to help victims of the HIV virus. I was moved by many of the victims' stories and as exhausting as the work was, I left Africa with a satisfied feeling that I had contributed to their well-being and brought hope to their future. Many years passed and then in late 2007, I fell victim to the pneumonia, was admitted to the Huntington Hospital, and began the fight for my life (and I still do everyday). Three months later, I relapsed, again fighting for my life, and at that time, the doctor took a biopsy of my lung and gave me the dreaded diagnosis that I was HIV. Shocked, confused and utterly bewildered, I had no idea how being careful in my volunteer work that I had contacted HIV. At first, I was in denial as I had to concentrate on survival since I was a full-time employee and being that my job was stressful, I had to carry on. Finally, after many strenuous years of working and with my health deteriorating, I had to leave my job. You see, stress contributes to the struggles of living with HIV even more so than people without HIV. Now, at 68 years old and finding refuge at the Escajeda clinic, I still struggle but I know that the Escajeda clinic is there to help me with my continuous battle with HIV.

I have kept my HIV affliction a hidden secret for the most part dreading being labeled as a piece of dirt or even worse. HIV has many stereotype faces and is a disease that carries a high negative stigma; however, I am a normal senior citizen that you would see on the streets of Pasadena. I do not have a close family and I am basically alone fighting this disease. Some days are good, some days not so good. I have skin cancer, among other things, and my health is generally fair, but not good. I attend women's group at the Escajeda clinic to find comfort and have met many people, both staff employees and those inflicted with HIV, and we all have become one big supportive family. There are many HIV stories and many HIV faces at the Escajeda clinic, but we all have a common focus: to hope there will be a vaccine to cure HIV but knowing that we are fighting each and every day a virus that will be a burden to us the rest of our lives.

As a result of my HIV, I have become somewhat reclusive since I am consumed by this horrible virus. For instance, I have lost a lot of friends. Am I being stigmatized for trying to make a difference in the world back in the 1990's? What other horrible health issue might befall me since the HIV virus leaves me vulnerable to kidney failure, liver problems, cancers, and possible malignancies? Fighting HIV is not easy; the medications are hard on my body; and day-to-day tasks are incredibly hard to maintain. I have worked hard all my life to be a good citizen and do the right thing and then the blow of having HIV has not sat well with who I am. I continue to make mortgage payments and pay taxes on my social security check. It is not an easy life nor is it one that I envisioned as a young adult looking forward to my later years. Being human, I could ask "why me?", "how could my volunteer work lead to this horrific ending," etc., but I can't for it would drive me to a deeper canyon of anguish. Yes, I am for the most part angry that I am permanently sick and have the HIV virus but positively, I wake up each day with faith and hope and prayer.

The Escajeda clinic, the adjacent Michael D. Antonovich Dental Clinic ("Dental Clinic") and the food pantry have been life-saving utilizations. The staff members have been wonderful never condoning and never putting me down for my disease. They are a blessing and not only have helped me, but have helped all of us who walk in the door at the Escajeda clinic, the Dental Clinic and the food pantry.

It is with great humbleness and humility that I urge you to not close the Escajeda clinic, the adjacent Dental Clinic and the food pantry. Many clients commute long distances, some without a car depending on public transportation, to seek help and services at the Escajeda clinic. Many staff members have mortgages just like me and most are raising families and are good people feeling that their jobs may soon become non-existent. As a side note, I was at the Dental Clinic today and one employee told me that she quit her 13-year job to work at the Dental Clinic. She further told me that she might have thought differently if she knew she was going to lose her job three years later.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your consideration and understanding of my story, one of many, to ensure that the Escajeda clinic, the Dental Clinic and food pantry are sustained for us to live a normal life that we are deserving of as all San Gabriel Valley residents are. The City of Pasadena has been a vision of leadership in the San Gabriel Valley and has taken steps to make it a great and growing city. We, associated with the Escajeda clinic, the Dental Clinic and the food pantry, are all worthy of that continuing relationship with the City of Pasadena.

With gratitude and sincerity,

/s/ Paula L. Adams  
Pasadena, CA

P.S. I live in Council Member Margaret McAustin's district.