March 3, 2003

Dear President Bush:

As the world examines the accomplishments and challenges towards our goal of eliminating HIV/AIDS, we need to look at the realities that make women and girls vulnerable to this deadly disease. Access to treatment is extending the lives of HIV-positive people, but unwanted pregnancy among HIV-positive women is growing. While incidents of HIV are declining, women continue to become infected through sexual transmission. Unless steps are taken to address their HIV/AIDS *and* sexual and reproductive health needs, women and girls will remain victims.

Marriage poses significant risk of HIV infection for women in many parts of the world. In fact, more than eighty percent of new HIV infections in women occur in marriage or in long-term relationships. HIV prevention policy in the U.S. continues to emphasize abstinence, but encouraging condom use would better protect women. Funding for HIV/AIDS prevention is rarely combined with family planning and reproductive health programs that provide needed services to women and their families.

Only through financial and political support for the integration of HIV/AIDS and family planning services can we give women and girls a true chance at survival.

I urge you to support legislation that integrates HIV/AIDS and family planning services.

Sincerely,

John H. Smith