The Health Not Prisons Collective Is Launched to Reform HIV Crime Laws

Plus: The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation and Gilead Sciences join the collective for a virtual town hall June 25.

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Five organizations that work to update HIV crime laws launched the Health Not Prisons Collective, an intersectional national initiative focused on tackling HIV criminalization in the United States.

The five groups are the Counter Narrative Project, which bolsters empowering stories of Black gay men, Positive Women's Network–USA, the Sero Project, the Transgender Law Center (TLC) and the U.S. Caucus of People Living with HIV, according to a press release from PWN-USA.

The collective will work to change HIV laws through advocacy, education, impact litigation, narrative shifts and legal resources, including Black attorneys.

In related news, The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation (ETAF) announced it is partnering with pharmaceutical manufacturer Gilead Sciences and the Health Not Prisons Collective on efforts to modernize HIV laws. ETAF will host a virtual town hall titled "HIV is Not a Crime" on Thursday, June 25, at 5 p.m. EST (2 p.m. PST) to launch and discuss the criminalization initiative.

"Very simply, science and the law have not caught up with each other on this issue," said ETAF executive director Catherine Brown in the ETAF press release. "There is a disparity between what science tells us and what the laws and statutes in more than 30 states believe. HIV is not a crime, and those living with HIV are being held back by harmful laws and policies that discourage people from getting tested and treated."

The science Brown cites is the fact that people with HIV who maintain a suppressed viral load cannot transmit HIV sexually, even if condoms are not used. This is commonly referred to as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, or U=U.

To register for the town hall and submit questions, go to hivisnotacrime-etaf.org or text ETAF to 33777. The event is free.

The panelists will be Douglas Brooks, the executive director of community engagement at Gilead;

Cecilia Chung, the director of evaluation and strategic initiatives at the Transgender Law Center, Robert Suttle, a social justice educator; and Rick Chavez Zbur, the executive director of Equality California. Journalist Sunny Hostin, of ABC's The View, will host the event.

Meanwhile, in its press release, the collective spells out these seven goals:

- Significantly advance HIV decriminalization efforts in at least eight priority states;
- Expand legal resources in the U.S. South and build powerful case law through litigation work;
- Develop a network of Black attorneys to address HIV decriminalization;
- Elevate HIV criminalization as a priority for intersecting movement groups focused on mass incarceration and policing;
- Deploy compelling cultural productions and media interventions that shift narratives of blame and punishment;
- Sustain a robust, grassroots decriminalization response that centers and elevates leadership by impacted communities: Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), people living with HIV, people involved in the sex trade, substance users, imprisoned and detained people, people who access harm reduction services, immigrant and migrant populations, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people, people with disabilities, and no- and low-income people;
- Contribute to visionary organizing and movement building for abolition of the criminalization of sex work, drug use, and imprisonment/detention-based economies; ending mass incarceration; and ensuring sanctuary and safety for all immigrants.

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