HIV Criminalization Awareness Day 2022

How you can join the effort to confront unjust HIV crime laws, protect marginalized communities and end mass incarceration

February 28, 2022 By Trent Straube

Monday, February 28, marks HIV Criminalization Awareness Day (HCAD) 2022. The first annual event is spearheaded by the Sero Project, a nonprofit that fights HIV crime laws, along with the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation and other HIV advocacy groups across the globe.

"This date is significant," the organizers state, "in that it honors the birthday of Elizabeth Taylor [the iconic actress and AIDS activist who was born February 27 and would have turned 90 this year].... In recognition of her life, advocates nationwide can gather to carry out her ironclad compassion in shifting HIV stigma narratives from ignorance to informed."

HIV criminalization refers to the use of unfair laws to target people who have HIV—notably, African-American, Latino and LGBTQ people and women—and punish them because of their HIV status, not because of their actions. Under outdated laws, people with HIV can be sentenced to prison in cases where HIV was not transmitted simply for allegedly not disclosing their status.

> Come witness the discussion around a new awareness day to help advocates in the HIV decriminalization movement. Register for the #HINACDay webinar on 2/28 at 6 pm ET now! https://t.co/d2E1rAF5f8 #HINACDay #HINACDay22 #HIVIsNotACrime pic.twitter.com/KdwdI4xKEf
>
> — The Sero Project (@TheSeroProject) February 24,

2022

The awareness day organizers are hosting "HIV Is Not A Crime Awareness Day Official Event," a webinar at 6 p.m. ET, Monday, February 28 (click the link to register). In describing the webinar, they write:

> "[HIV Criminalization Awareness Day] is intended to raise awareness of communities impacted by the policing of a person's health status, the laws that exacerbate disenfranchisement of people with HIV and other health conditions, and the advocacy underway in the U.S. and around the world to end HIV criminalization.
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> "The goal for this awareness day is to amplify the leadership of the movement builders working to reform the criminalization laws in the country. This awareness day will accomplish that by creating opportunities to further engage with national and local organizations and stakeholders in the medical, policy, public health, law enforcement, social justice and public sectors."

A related Zoom webinar, hosted by the Mississippi Center for Justice, takes place earlier, at 3 p.m., Monday, February 28, and is titled "Confronting HIV Criminalization: Promoting Criminalization Justice Reform to Protect Marginalized Communities and End Mass Incarceration."

JOIN US on Mon, Feb 28 for Confronting HIV Criminalization a two-part webinar for HIV Crim Awareness Day. The event will connect HIV crim w other forms of over-policing & point to new pathways for criminal justice reform. Register: https://t.co/JMUkU7jUQi pic.twitter.com/mTakSBAxQk

— Mississippi Center for Justice (@justice4ms) February 25, 2022

Webinar sponsors include The Center for HIV Law and Policy; the Association of Prosecuting

Attorneys; the Williams Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles; Prevention Access Campaign; HEAT (Health & Education Alternatives for Teens); and Fair Trials.

HCAD "is an opportunity to shine a spotlight on HIV criminalization as part of a broader pattern of criminalizing people based on disfavored identities, health status and disabilities," write the organizers. "This two-part event will draw connections between HIV criminalization and other forms of criminalization and over-policing, and point to coalitions and partnerships that offer new pathways for broader criminal justice reform."

For more background about HCAD, see "Coming Soon: HIV Criminalization Awareness Day [VIDEO]," which includes a dialogue with leaders in the movement.

> HIV criminalization laws are outdated and unjust. Join @TheSeroProject @ETAForg and community partners in the first #HINACDay 2/28 to examine how we #StrengthenEngageReformOvercome the criminalization of HIV! pic.twitter.com/1tVbCat8fj
>
> — Kamaria Laffrey (@mrs_kam) February 22, 2022

It should be noted that repealing HIV laws does not mean that people can't be held accountable for intentionally transmitting HIV. Other laws may apply to the situation.

Many HIV laws were passed in the early days of the epidemic, when fear and lack of scientific knowledge about the virus reigned. Fast-forward four decades, and today we know, for instance, that people with HIV who take their meds and maintain an undetectable viral load do not transmit the virus sexually, a fact referred to as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, or U=U.

Last month, New Jersey modernized its HIV crime laws. And in 2021, Illinois became the second state to completely repeal its discriminatory HIV crime laws (California did so in 2017). Lawmakers in Missouri, Nevada and Virginia have also updated similar laws. For more, see "Breaking HIV Laws: A Roundup of Efforts to Decriminalize HIV."

To learn more about other HIV awareness days, including a calendar you can download and print, visit "2022 HIV/AIDS Awareness Days."

Happy birthday, @ElizabethTaylor! We honor Elizabeth’s courageous spirit today and always.

Join us in celebrating and receive a replica of the Elizabeth Taylor Diamond Ring, formerly known as the Krupp Dimond, for a donation of $500 or more: https://t.co/6FHpc56PHj pic.twitter.com/logbik32rx

— The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation (@ETAForg) February 27, 2022

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