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New Statewide Coalition Created to End Criminalization of People Living With HIV

Chicago, Ill.—The [Illinois HIV Action Alliance](#) is a new statewide coalition of legal, health, policy organizations, and other advocates - launched today in an organized effort to end HIV criminalization in Illinois.

Currently, Illinois law criminalizes people living with HIV who are aware of their status and engage in condomless anal or vaginal intercourse (or who shares needles, donates blood, or “otherwise provides blood, tissue, semen, organs, or other possibly infections bodily fluids”) without being able to later prove disclosure of their HIV status. A person living with HIV can be prosecuted even if they do not actually transmit HIV to another person. Violating this law can lead to felony criminal prosecution punishable by three to seven years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

The Illinois HIV Action Alliance consists of: AIDS Foundation of Chicago, American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois, Central Illinois Friends, Chicago Black Gay Men’s Caucus, Equality Illinois, Howard Brown Health, Illinois Public Health Association, Lambda Legal, Legal Council for Health Justice, Southside Health Advocacy Resource Partnership, and individual coalition members Christian Castro and Betty Donoval.

Illinois’ HIV-specific criminal law is harmful and unjust. The medical community and American society have made great progress in our understanding of HIV and how it is transmitted, prevented, and treated. Despite this, people in Illinois and other states still face antiquated laws that are rooted in harmful stereotypes and outdated science.

Rather than protect the public, this law may actually harm public health by discouraging individuals from getting tested for HIV and reducing the likelihood of disclosure to sexual or needle-sharing partners. Fearing prosecution - as well as stigma - some people living with HIV

avoid learning their HIV status. Laws like Illinois' increase stigma towards people living with HIV by leading to inflammatory or ill-informed media coverage that may perpetuate misinformation regarding modes of HIV transmission, reveal a person's sexual orientation or HIV status against their will, or play on harmful stereotypes.

People living with HIV who harbor no ill will and have no intent to harm anyone are prosecuted and often convicted under these laws, sometimes pleading guilty as part of a plea deal to avoid trial and a potentially longer sentence. Additionally, the enforcement of HIV-specific criminal laws also foster racial and sex-based disparities.

The Illinois HIV Action Alliance seeks to eliminate HIV-based social stigma and criminalization by centering the voices of people living with HIV, we promote the dignity, rights, and respect of the community through engagement, advocacy, and education.

For more information and to stay up-to-date on coalition efforts, go to:

Illinois HIV Action Alliance Facebook: www.facebook.com/hivactionIL

Illinois HIV Action Alliance Twitter: <https://twitter.com/HIVActionIL>

Illinois HIV Action Alliance Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/hivactionil/>