

## LAW PROJECT OFFERS NEW HOUSING CLINIC

*Good Counsel is published seasonally by the AIDS Law Project for our friends, volunteers and colleagues committed to protecting the rights of people with HIV and AIDS. The AIDS Law Project provides free legal services to nearly 1,800 people with HIV/AIDS each year, most of whom are low-income and have nowhere else to turn for help. We help people navigate the legal system, the welfare system, the housing system and the worlds of public and private insurance. We provide education and training to thousands of professionals who work with people with AIDS.*

**A**lmost nothing jeopardizes the health of a person living with HIV or AIDS quicker than living on the street, or in a homeless shelter. Unfortunately, one of the most critical problems facing people with HIV/AIDS in Philadelphia is a shortage of safe and affordable housing.

The AIDS Law Project's new **HIV Housing Advocacy Program** helps people with HIV/AIDS avoid eviction. The program is staffed by attorneys Ronda Goldfein and Carolyn Silver (an Independence Fellow). Goldfein and Silver negotiate with private landlords and the Philadelphia Housing Authority; represent clients in housing court; and assist them in getting emergency rental assistance. They also train case managers and others about the legal rights of tenants.

**Goldfein and Silver have found that their legal assistance makes a dramatic difference in helping a person with AIDS keep a roof over his head.**

"Tenants are very vulnerable in housing court—without legal intervention, they almost always lose," Goldfein says. Typically, a landlord comes to the eviction proceedings with an attorney. "The tenant usually



*The AIDS Law Project's housing team is, from left, Ronda Goldfein, senior staff attorney; Carolyn Silver, staff attorney; and Yolanda French Lollis, managing attorney.*

arrives without a lawyer and is so scared that he will sign any payment agreement, no matter how unrealistic, just to avoid eviction," Goldfein explains. When the tenant can't make the unrealistic payments, he is evicted.

"We've been shocked by how many people with AIDS have called for help with housing issues," Goldfein says. "And we're pleased how successful we've been helping them negotiate payment plans or buy time to find a new place," she adds. "It's really about advising tenants what their rights are; reminding landlords what their legal obligations are; and giving the tenant back some negotiating power," she explains. "Once clients know that we are taking care of the legal issues," Silver says, "they can focus their energies on taking care of their health, keeping up with their medications and finding a new place to live."

For information about the housing clinic, call the AIDS Law Project at **215/587-9377**.

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



NEWSLETTER OF THE  
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*This newsletter is lovingly dedicated  
to the memory of AIDS Law Project  
Board Members Michael Greenberg and  
Jonathan Lax, Intake Advocate  
Arnold Jackson and VISTA Volunteer  
David Bertugli.*

*If you know someone who would like to  
receive a copy or need to let us know of an  
address change, please call Martha  
McDonald, editor, at 215/587-9377.*

In this issue of *Good Counsel*, I want to share my decision to resign from the AIDS Law Project this summer. I will return to school in the fall to pursue a Master's degree in Public Health. I hope to develop greater knowledge and expertise in public health so that I can become a stronger advocate to help low-income people in Philadelphia access quality health care.

As I look back on my nine years at the Law Project, I am struck by the many lessons I have learned here. I have witnessed the courage of clients who fought discrimination so that others with HIV won't suffer as they did. I still marvel at the tenacity and finesse of our staff who won't take "no" for an answer when trying to help a client. I am inspired by the compassion of medical care providers who go the extra mile for patients with HIV. I am grateful for the vast improvements in medical treatments, which allow so many people with HIV to live healthier lives.

Not all I have learned has been joyful. I've witnessed the inequities that continue to threaten people with HIV, particularly those with low incomes and from communities of color. I've heard first-hand from inmates released from jail without medications, and from patients denied medically needed care by their insurance companies. I've spoken with overworked bureaucrats who are unmoved—and seemingly unmoveable—when asked to respond to the urgent needs of our clients.

What stands out most for me, though, has been to witness how a caring, determined attorney can make the difference in whether a person with HIV has medical care and other basic necessities of life. It is with immense pride that I leave knowing that the AIDS Law Project will continue this important work. The future of the AIDS Law Project is financially secure and the agency is in good hands. Because of the tremendous leadership, skills and compassion of the staff and Board, I am confident that the Law Project will excel, perhaps in new, unforeseen ways, after I leave.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to use my expertise as a lawyer to fight for the rights of people with HIV and AIDS.



—Nan Feyler

## LEGAL SERVICES — 1999

Public Benefits 21%

HIV testing/confidentiality/  
transmission 10%

Prison issues 11%

Housing issues 9%

Family law 10%

Estate/personal documents 8%

Discrimination 7%

Private Insurance benefits 7%

Financial issues 6%

Miscellaneous 11%

## CLIENT PROFILE — 1999

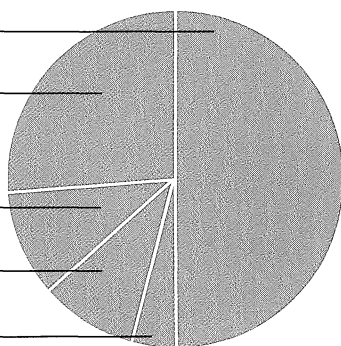
African American 50%

Caucasian 26%

Hispanic/Latino 10%

Unknown\* 10%

Other 4%



MALE 69%

FEMALE 31%

\*includes incarcerated clients  
contacting us by mail

# Thanks!

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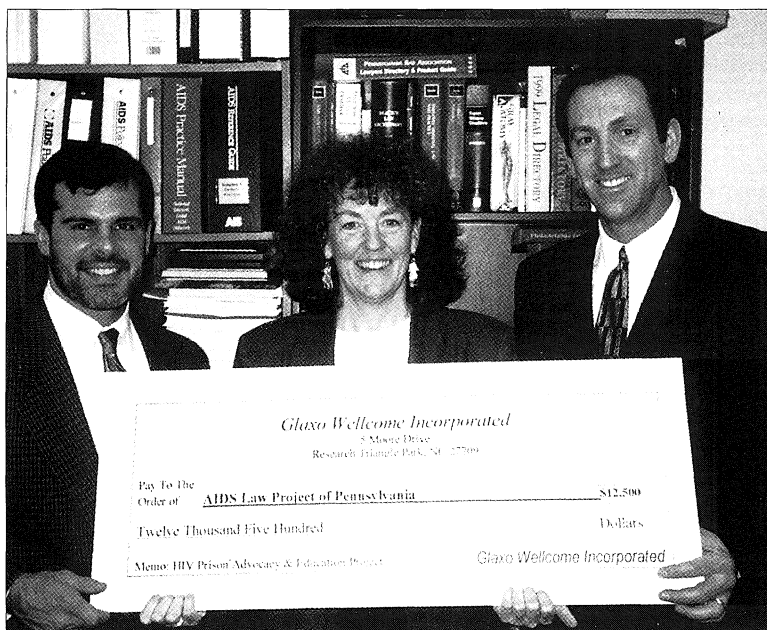
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Glaxo Wellcome, Inc. awarded the AIDS Law Project \$12,500 to support our HIV Prison Advocacy and Education Project. Pictured here presenting the award to Nan Feyler, AIDS Law Project executive director (center), are Frank Ratchford (left), Glaxo Wellcome executive sales representative, and Stephen Novis, regional government affairs manager.

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*Contributions received 9/15/99 through 2/29/00.*

### ***Independence Foundation Challenge Grant Continues!***

Last Fall, Independence Foundation issued the AIDS Law Project a challenge—to raise \$25,000 in new money over the next year, which they will match dollar for dollar. This will bring in \$50,000 in new money to help the Law Project fight for the rights of people with HIV and AIDS.

**We need you to help raise \$25,000 by September 15, 2000!** Please make a gift in the enclosed envelope. Every new dollar you donate now will be matched—doubling your gift!

*(donor lists conclude on back page)*

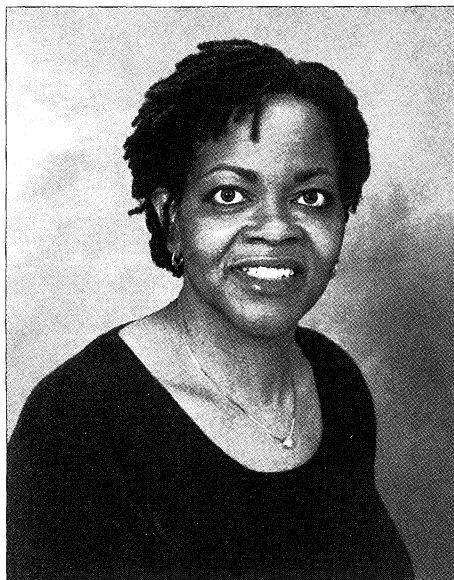
## STAFF PROFILE

Meet **Yolanda French Lollis**, managing attorney of the AIDS Law Project. Yolanda has worked for the Law Project since 1993, representing and advising people with HIV and AIDS wrongly denied Social Security benefits, and helping HIV-positive immigrants obtain life-saving medical care while fighting for their right to remain in this country. Additionally, she supervises the Law Project's staff of lawyers and paralegals.

Yolanda is also the pastor of St. Mark United Methodist Church, a 140-member congregation in Montgomery County. Under her leadership, the church became involved in the needs of people with AIDS. In 1998, the church formed its first AIDS Walk team and started monthly donations to a food bank serving women with AIDS.

Yolanda's commitment to social justice is rooted in her Kentucky childhood. Her father was active in the civil rights movement. He and his young children marched to end segregation in amusement parks and movie theaters. When Yolanda was 11 years old, she spent a summer of what she calls "full immersion" with the Black Panther Party at a local church. "I discovered early on who I was and what I wanted out of life," she recalls. "I've always had a physical reaction to injustice. It causes an itch that demands to be scratched."

Fresh out of law school, Yolanda worked for the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights. The work was extremely difficult, Yolanda recalls. She crisscrossed the



state, investigating and prosecuting race and sex discrimination cases in small coal mining towns. "Folks didn't take too kindly to a black woman showing up to investigate," she recalls, "but this job was about being the voice for people who long since had been pressed into silence."

Soon after she began work at the Law Project, Yolanda began preaching at her church. A calling to the ministry that had been tugging at her since childhood could no longer be ignored, and she began working toward a degree in ministry. Yolanda sees her work at the Law Project as a reflection of her faith. "Being compassionate in the delivery of quality legal services, that's what I try to do here," she says. "In the process, I meet amazing people who face tremendous obstacles yet find the inner strength to fight on."

"Part of why I stay here is because I can't let go of the clients who die," Yolanda reflects. "Perhaps I am trying to honor them in my work, trying to make things right."

### *Law Project provides more . . .*

In addition to direct legal services to individuals, the Law Project offers *education and training* to prevent discrimination and other legal problems for people with HIV and AIDS *before* they occur.

Last year, the Law Project trained nearly 1,200 people in over 60 workshops across the region about the legal rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.

We distributed 300 copies of our handbook *AIDS and the Law: Your Rights in Pennsylvania*,

500 copies of each issue of our newsletter *Public Benefits News*, and

250 copies of our new *Standby Guardianship Newsletter*.



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*Richard Schall and Patricia Barasch of Schall & Barasch LLC flank AIDS Law Project Executive Director Nan Feyler, presenting her with a \$5,000 check following the successful settlement of an HIV-discrimination case.*

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