

HIV-positive Peruvian wins political asylum

After three years of work by the AIDS Law Project, **Luis Casas** of South Philadelphia won political asylum. An immigration judge ruled he had a well-founded fear of persecution in his native Peru because he had been persecuted there as an HIV-positive homosexual.

The November 28 ruling allows Luis to stay in the United States permanently. After one year he may file to become a "lawful permanent resident" as the next step to becoming a citizen, the ruling says.

Growing up in Lima, he suffered anti-gay ridicule and violence most of his life, Luis says. He was regularly harassed by local police, who often forced him to pay large sums of money to avoid being outed to his family.

After Luis was diagnosed with AIDS in 1995, "life became unbearable," he says. Medical treatment in Lima was insufficient and degrading. When a hospital administrator called his employer to inquire about his insurance coverage, news of his HIV status spread like wildfire. He was stripped of his managerial duties in the family business and was ostracized by co-workers. His parents stopped speaking to him. The rest of his family soon shunned him as well.

Most distressing, Luis says, was the limited supply of HIV medications available in Peru. His doctor switched from one drug regimen to another based on availability, risking dangerous viral resistance. Luis made several visits to the United States to buy HIV medications. Three years ago, he decided not to return home and called the AIDS Law Project for help.

AIDS Law Project attorneys helped Luis secure

a visa extension and then began the lengthy fight for political asylum. With the help of Luis Salas, a fellow Peruvian who works for GALAEI, an HIV-prevention program in Philadelphia's Latino community, the AIDS Law Project gathered testimony from expert witnesses on the dangerous conditions for HIV-positive gay men in



Peru. Salas testified at Luis' hearing.

"Political asylum saved Luis' life," says AIDS Law Project attorney Linda Hee (*seen above at left with Luis and AIDS Law Project Managing Attorney Yolanda French Lollis*), who represented Luis in the asylum proceedings. "To be openly gay and HIV-positive is life-threatening in Peru. The immigration judge recognized that danger and granted him asylum."

Luis says he hopes to become an American citizen and pursue a career in nursing.

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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 Volunteers
Gary Bailey and 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.*

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Friends,

We are happy to celebrate the victory of
Luis Casas, the subject of our cover story.

The AIDS Law Project devoted three
lawyers, two translators and thousands of hours
to this case over two years. There's no way that
Luis, with limited funds, could have hired a lawyer in his quest for political
asylum.

The AIDS Law Project fights for the rights of people who, like Luis,
can't afford legal representation. But we also help folks who are perfectly
able to pay an attorney in the private sector, yet prefer to trust our
experience and sensitivity.

Such was the case for these clients within the last year:

- The dot-com entrepreneur with HIV who asked us to review his insurance policy because he feared that going to the company lawyer might spread rumors that could jeopardize his fledgling firm;
- The university professor with HIV who wanted to update his will and had questions about funeral and estate plans but didn't want to involve his family's longtime lawyer;
- The Main Line woman who needed immediate legal expertise after she discovered that her brother was in the hospital in the end stages of AIDS.

For more than 13 years, the AIDS Law Project has been here for everyone affected by the epidemic—including the case managers, doctors, lawyers, researchers, academicians and employers who call on us for guidance every day. We're here for everyone, regardless of means, as we were here for Luis Casas. And we intend to continue doing this important work for as long as necessary.

With that goal in mind, we've relocated our offices to better serve our clients. We're now on the 6th floor at 1211 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, and we're having an open house from 5 to 7:30p.m. on Tuesday, May 7. I hope to see you there.

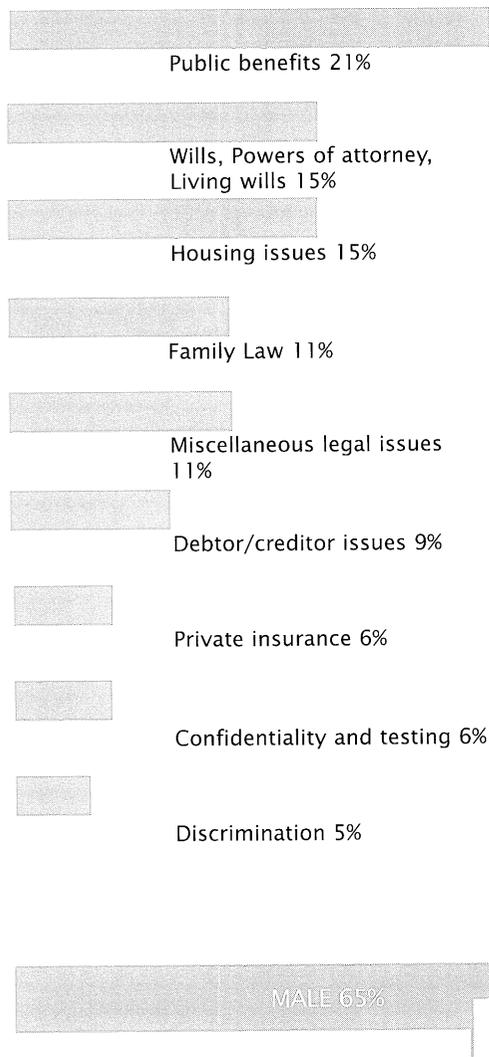


Good Counsel is published seasonally by the AIDS Law Project for our friends, volunteers and colleagues committed to protecting the rights of people with HIV and AIDS. The AIDS Law Project provides free legal services to nearly 1,800 people with HIV/AIDS each year, many of whom have nowhere else to turn 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.



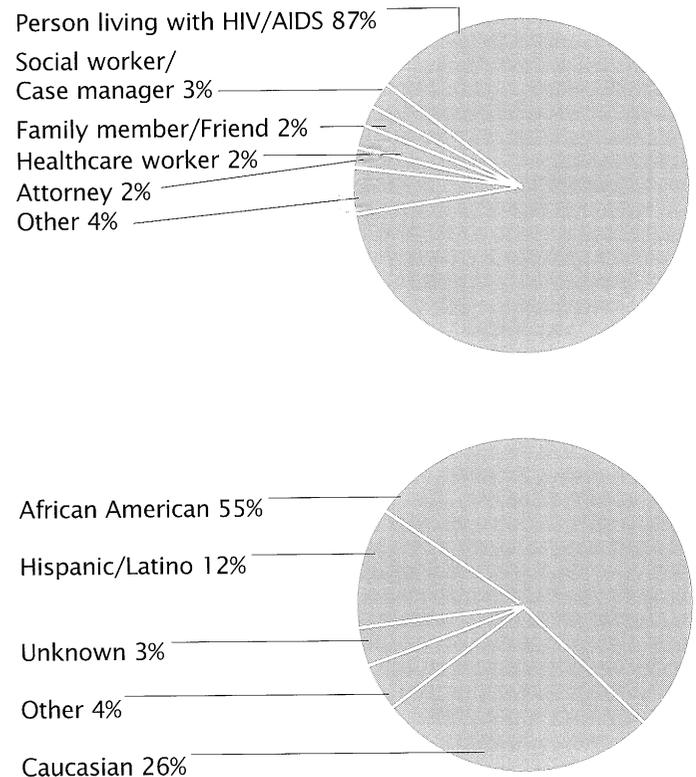
LEGAL SERVICES — 2001

(Many clients receive more than one kind of legal service)



TOTAL REQUESTS FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE — 1,603

CLIENT PROFILES



NEW SCHEDULES

Back-to-Work Seminars

New drug treatments enable many people with AIDS to feel healthy enough to work. Many who are considering returning to work fear losing their benefits, particularly the health care that made them feel well enough to work in the first place. The AIDS Law Project offers a free seminar to help people with AIDS transition into the work force without losing critical health coverage. Seminars take place the second Tuesday of every month:

April 9, 2-4pm
 May 14, 2-4pm
 and 6-8pm
 June 11, 2-4pm
 July 9, 2-4pm
 and 6-8pm
 Aug 13, 2-4pm

Sept 10, 2-4pm
 and 6-8pm
 Oct 8, 2-4pm
 Nov 12, 2-4pm
 and 6-8pm
 Dec 10, 2-4pm

Leaving Your Job Seminars

For people with HIV/AIDS who become too sick to work and are considering leaving their job, the AIDS Law Project offers a free seminar to help make that transition smoothly. Seminar participants explore issues including: applying for disability benefits; keeping insurance coverage after leaving a job; and the effect of an HIV diagnosis on an existing insurance policy. Seminars take place the second Wednesday of every month:

April 10, 6-8pm
 June 12, 2-4pm
 and 6-8pm
 Aug 14, 6-8pm
 Sept 11, 2-4pm
 Nov 13, 6-8pm
 Dec 11, 2-4pm

Seminars held at 1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 600, in Philadelphia. To register, call 215.587.9377.

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MOVIN' ON UP!

Well, down, really. The AIDS Law Project just moved from our 12th floor office to new offices on the sixth floor of 1211 Chestnut Street, which allows greater privacy for our clients. Special thanks to Mike Ippoliti of Knoll Studios, Jennifer Bates and Brian Green for helping us design our new space. Come check out our new digs at an Open House on Tuesday, May 7, 2002, 5 to 7:30pm.

New Medical Assistance and prescription programs available

In January 2002, Pennsylvania implemented two new health-care programs that expand Medical Assistance coverage to people with HIV/AIDS.

Under one program, **Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD)**, disabled people who work may purchase Medical Assistance coverage, including prescription coverage. To qualify for MAWD, individuals must be: between 16 and 64 years old; working, with an income less than \$1,760/month; with resources less than \$10,000.

Disabled people who were not previously income-eligible for Medical Assistance now have a way to get coverage. Previously, this level of coverage was available only to disabled people earning less than \$737/month. MAWD allows disabled people who are working to earn up to \$1,000 more a month and still qualify for Medical Assistance.

The second new program, **Medical Assistance for Women with Breast or Cervical Cancer**, provides full coverage to uninsured women who are diagnosed with breast cancer, cervical cancer, or some pre-cancerous conditions of the cervix. To qualify for the new program, a woman must be under 65, a Pennsylvania resident and without health insurance. An eligible woman is

entitled to full Medical Assistance for a six- to 12-month period while receiving cancer treatment. Extensions in coverage may be available if continued treatment is required.

In related news, four drug companies recently announced discount programs for low-income Medicare recipients who don't have a prescription drug plan.

GlaxoSmithKline's Orange Card offers 30 per cent savings on all GlaxoSmithKline drugs to Medicare recipients whose income is less than \$26,000 a year. For information and applications, call 1-888-ORANGE6.

The Novartis Care Card program uses the same income limit and offers similar discounts on select Novartis products. For enrollment information, call 1-866-974-2273.

Pfizer's Share Card program has an annual income limit of \$18,000. Pfizer offers 30-day prescriptions for a \$15 co-pay on all its drugs. For enrollment information, call 1-800-717-6005.

Eli Lilly's LillyAnswers program uses the same income limit as Pfizer and offers 30-day prescriptions for a \$12 co-pay on most of its products. For enrollment applications, call 1-877-RX-LILLY.

In debt? We can help.

As new medications enable people with AIDS to live longer, many are struggling with crushing debt from expenses related to their illness. Many people with AIDS who became sick and lost their jobs were forced to make desperate decisions about finances such as charging medications, doctor visits and even groceries to their credit cards.

Unpaid debt and a poor credit history can make it impossible to rent a better apartment, buy a home or just move on with life. For people with AIDS in poor health, constant harassment by debt collectors chips away at their strength and ability to fight the disease.

The AIDS Law Project's new Debt Management Program helps people with HIV/AIDS understand their rights and responsibilities with creditors, and advises them on ways to reduce or eliminate debt. The program is staffed by attorneys Linda Hee and Carolyn Silver.

At the core of the new program is a free monthly seminar that helps people with HIV/AIDS explore options for managing debt. The two-hour seminar provides critical information on: reviewing a credit report for accuracy; credit

counseling services and payment plans; writing a judgment-proof letter; and filing for bankruptcy. Hee and Silver provide legal advice and representation to seminar participants who need additional help with debt issues.

"Dealing with debt collectors is very stressful," Hee says. "Once clients know that we are taking care of the legal issues, they can focus their energies on taking care of their health."

Seminars take place the second Thursday of every month at 1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 600:

April 11, 6-8 pm
May 16, 2-4 pm
June 13, 6-8 pm
July 11, 2-4 pm
August 15, 6-8 pm
September 12, 2-4 pm
October 10, 6-8 pm
November 14, 2-4 pm
December 12, 2-4 pm

To register, call 215.587.9377.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Maria Frontera, MSW, LSW, is director of the children, youth and families program at the Health Federation of Philadelphia. She oversees the Early Head Start program for pregnant and parenting teens and young adults in the Norris Central Empowerment Zone, and the Home Visitation Program for high-risk pregnant and parenting women and their young children.



Sean Halpin, Esq., is a partner at Reed Smith LLP. Sean worked at the AIDS Law Project in the early 'nineties, while completing his law degree at the University of Pennsylvania. As a student intern, he drafted some of the original sections of *AIDS and the Law: Your Rights in Pennsylvania*. Sean now provides *pro bono* counsel to AIDS Law Project clients.



Angine Harriott, Esq., is an associate in Saul Ewing LLP's business department. Angine has a bachelor of arts degree in history and Afro-American studies from the University of Pennsylvania and a law degree from Duke. She is a member of the American Bar Association, National Bar Association, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Philadelphia bar associations; and the Barrister's Association.



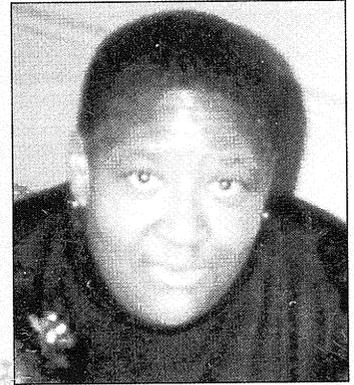
Gregory L. Liacouras, Esq., is a founding member of Liacouras & Smith LLP, where he focuses on civil litigation. He graduated magna cum laude from Temple University Law School, and practiced at Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll LLP. Greg has also traded gold and silver futures and options on the New York Commodities Exchange.



Sara Velazquez, Esq., is an associate in Saul Ewing LLP's business and public finance departments, and is a member of the firm's hiring committee. She is vice president of the Hispanic Bar Association of Pennsylvania and serves on the boards of ActionAIDS and the Girl Scouts of Southeastern Pennsylvania. Sara worked at the AIDS Law Project for two years as an Independence Foundation Fellow.

BOARD PROFILE

Meet **Sandra Thompson**, president of the AIDS Law Project's board of directors.



Sandra is executive director of St Mary's Family Respite Center, a safe and nurturing day care facility for children in HIV-affected families. The Center picks up children and brings them to the Mantua-based program allowing parents time to schedule medical appointments, attend school, or take a much-needed break.

Highly regarded in the AIDS service community, Sandra is often described as level-headed and a straight shooter. "Life is too short for petty stuff," she says. "I don't like gossip. It doesn't get anything done."

And Sandra gets things done. She's a founding member of OutFront, a gay and lesbian political-action committee; a board member of the Center for Responsible Funding; and former chair of the AIDS Fund board. She is also a member of the 16th Police District's Youth Aid Panel whose goal is to keep first-time juvenile offenders out of the system.

"I've always been committed to appropriate services for the disabled," she says. "It's a segment of the population that most people just don't care about."

Sandra's introduction to AIDS activism came in the late 1980s when she took a consulting job with BEBASHI, providing organizational development assistance to other AIDS service organizations. "I started meeting HIV-positive people," she recalls, "and that opened my eyes to the full impact of the epidemic."

Around the same time, Sandra and her partner Rebecca Baranowski were caring for a friend with AIDS. "It was the 'eighties, and people were dying right and left," says Sandra. "I looked around and thought 'this is one more issue that's having a very negative impact on people of color.'" Getting involved in the fight against AIDS was "just the right thing to do," she says.

As chair of the AIDS Law Project's personnel committee, Sandra provides invaluable guidance on organizational issues, most recently helping the agency strengthen its personnel policies. Her no-nonsense style and sense of humor set a tone for productive board meetings.

Despite her long days running St Mary's, Sandra says her work with the AIDS Law Project gives her renewed energy. "There is a high level of commitment among the board members to seeing that the staff have what they need to make sure that disenfranchised people get justice," she says. "And that's very important to me."