

WWW.AIDSLAWPA.ORG SPRING 2025

Victory in Case Against Tattoo Parlor

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) has ruled that a tattoo shop that refused to tattoo a man living with HIV illegally discriminated against him.

The AIDS Law Project represented "John Grey," who wanted to get a tattoo of a phoenix, a mythological bird that symbolizes rebirth, immortality, and renewal. To John, the phoenix represented his status as a long-term survivor of HIV.

In December 2022 he texted a tattoo artist in the small Central Pennsylva-

nia town where he lived. The artist was a relative of a close friend of his, who knew he was living with HIV. He didn't hear anything back until January and when he did he was shocked, said Adrian M. Lowe, a senior staff attorney at the AIDS Law Project. The tattoo artist responded that he didn't work on anyone with a known blood-borne pathogen. HIV is John's only blood-borne pathogen.

Adrian contacted the business and advised that the science and the law were clear. Universal Precautions, in-

troduced by the Centers for Disease Control in 1985, mostly in response to HIV, are the recommended guidelines to prevent HIV transmission in the workplace. Tattoo shops that utilize universal precautions can safely tattoo people living with HIV, and refusing to tattoo based on HIV is illegal discrimination and a violation of state and federal anti-discrimination laws.

Adrian's repeated attempts to explain the science and the law to the business were rebuffed.

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State Policy Collaborative Is Back in Action

A few years ago, the AIDS Law Project helped create the PA HIV Policy Collaborative, a group that met intermittently in-person to develop sound and equitable policies for people living with HIV.

Unfortunately, the burden of statewide in-person meetings put our group on hold.

But now we're back – and recast as a listsery! Ronda B. Goldfein, executive director of the AIDS Law Project, said such a service is vital to our community.

"In a time of great change in policy and resources,

the AIDS Law Project believes it's important that we strengthen our community by sharing information and resources," Ronda said.

HIV Policy Collab 2.0 will exchange information about any changes in state-wide benefits and programs, share trends in services, dispel rumors, and provide updates on developing policy matters.

To join Collab 2.0, email collab2.0admin@aidslawpa. org and request to be added to the listserv. Subscriptions may take up to three days to

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Interns Liam Sliva, Temple Class of 2029 (left), and Joelle Williams, Harvard Class of 2026, with Ronda B. Goldfein, executive director of the AIDS Law Project.

INSIDE

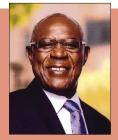
NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

After suffering a heart attack and losing his apartment, a client needed unusual help. Page 2



LEGAL SERVICES BY THE NUMBERS

We worked on 1,807 cases for 1,113 clients in 2024. Here's a statistical look at our work last year. **Page 4**



TRAILBLAZER

The Philadelphia Bar Foundation posthumously honors **Frank McClellan**, a longtime board member. **Page 6**



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NAVIGATIN

Staying strong in a challenging time

Friends,

We at the AIDS Law Project remember the painful years when every week a client, friend, or community member died of HIV. Now we are seeing executive orders and funding cuts that may cause HIV to come roaring back.

Since taking office for the second time in January, President Donald Trump signed 143 executive orders as of May 4. Among them: federal agencies must end diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices; federal departments must define gender as an unchangeable malefemale binary determined by sex assigned at birth; transgender female athletes may not participate in girls' and women's sports teams; the Defense Department must ban transgender people from serving in the armed forces; federal funding is withheld from gender-affirming care for Americans under 19.

In addition, the National Institutes of Health canceled hundreds of active grants focused on various aspects of HIV, including prevention, treatment, and research on specific populations, such as adolescents and LGBTQ+ individuals.

These actions chip away at the dignity and self-respect of affected communities, leaving people to wonder about their rights. And uncertainty leads to not getting get tested and treated for HIV.

But we are staying strong. As of this writing, the AIDS Law Project's funding is secure. Our services are unchanged. We will continue to represent folks who turn to us for help, often because they have nowhere else to go. We will reassure our clients that they have not lost their legal rights. We will protect the everyday needs of vulnerable populations.

We hope you can remain strong along with us.

Konda

Guidance Helps Ease An Immigrant's Path to Citizenship

"Mary" was despondent when she first came to the AIDS Law Project in 2018, but when she visited again in April 2025 she was smiling from ear to ear.

Born in Cote d'Ivoire, she had fled her war-torn country and moved to Ghana before coming to the United States on a tourist visa in 2008.

She married a U.S. citizen in 2016, but by 2018 she realized she needed legal help, so she turned to **Yolanda French Lollis**, the AIDS Law Project's managing attorney.

"She had overstayed her tourist visa and was desperate," Yolanda said. "She really didn't have any place to go back to."

Yolanda started an application to get Mary a green card so she could stay in the U.S. with her husband. Documents such as a joint lease and joint bank statements are ideal to prove the authenticity of a marriage, but this couple did not believe that a wife should be added to a husband's accounts.

Despite their conservative views, their marriage was authentic and the task fell to Yolanda to prove it. She meticulously assembled and printed a photo album of 40 pictures with a legend showcasing the couple together at various times and events, including their wedding, holidays, family gatherings, and religious services.

"It was very labor intensive," Yolanda said.

The album was submitted along with her green card application to immigration officials. It was approved in March 2020 and Mary became a lawful permanent resident.

In 2024 she decided she wanted to become a U.S. citizen, but faced another hurdle. Although Mary's vision is severely impaired, she was not eligible for the citizenship disability waiver. Yolanda made sure she had access to large print and audio and video study guides for the English and civics

In April, Mary successfully completed the naturalization interview, including the English and civics tests. At long last, her citizenship oath ceremony was scheduled for May 8.

"She was so excited," Yolanda said when she visited the AIDS Law Project in April. "She just kept saying, 'I'm a citizen!'"

GOOD COUNSEL BY E-MAIL

Want to get the newsletter electronically? Sign up at AIDSLawPa.org/e-newsletter.

THE SYSTEM



'Cramdown' Plan Helps N.J. Couple Save Business

About three years ago a New Jersey man who owned a transportation business decided he needed to get an additional vehicle for his company. His husband, who had long-term employment and stable credit, took out a loan to buy a used SUV for the business.

The loan terms turned out to be beyond the means of the couple, so they turned to **Charlotte Hollander**, a senior staff attorney for the AIDS Law Project. She had known the business owner's husband for many years and had represented him on other matters.

"It was just a terrible loan," Charlotte said. "He couldn't keep up with the high interest rate on the payments."

By the time they came to see Charlotte in November they were three months behind in payments and at risk of losing the vehicle to repossession.

"They were at the end of their rope," Charlotte said. "The two men, both of who are living with HIV, built a successful business that was now at risk of going under, because of the high monthly interest rate on their loan."

Charlotte filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy for them in Camden. Because the bankruptcy involved a business, they had to provide the trustee with six months of business records to prove they could afford a new agreement.

"It was a lot of work to get all the required paperwork." Charlotte said.

Charlotte asked the court to implement what is known as a "cramdown," a plan that modifies or reduces a debt. Thanks to Charlotte's diligence, in February the court granted the Chapter 13 and substantially reduced the interest rate on the loan from about 23 percent to 9.5 percent, which was based on the prime rate as of the bankruptcy filing date plus 1.5 percent.

The creditor wanted \$16,000 for the balance of the loan. The vehicle wasn't worth nearly that much, and they settled on \$11,000.

"We brought it down to an affordable amount so now they're paying it off," Charlotte said. "It was a weight lifted off their shoulders."

When It's Not Just the Client Who Needs Rescuing

The AIDS Law Project generally isn't in the business of finding foster care for pets, but our work sometimes takes us in unexpected directions.

Marlon, a former client, got in touch with us concerning a dispute with the landlord of the subsidized apartment where he had lived for 20 years.

Shamus Brennan, the senior housing attorney at the AIDS Law Project, said resolving the dispute was more than Marlon, 67, could handle.

"He didn't know what to do and felt paralyzed by the situation," Shamus said.

Then it got worse.

Marlon had a heart attack in February 2024 and was hospitalized for an extended period, followed by a long stay in a rehabilitation facility. He ended up losing his apartment and many of his possessions.

On top of that Marlon was worried about what would happen to his beloved cat, Tigger. A friend took Tigger for a few weeks, but couldn't continue to take care of the cat. Tigger was in danger of being put out



Marlon and Tigger

on the street.

That's when Shamus remembered that **Arlene Vasquez**, the AIDS Law Project's administrative assistant, had rescued other cats. He asked her if she'd take Tigger and she didn't hesitate.

"That's my calling," Arlene said of rescuing cats.

After being released from the rehabilitation facility Marlon stayed with a friend for a few months until one of our partner organizations found him a new apartment. Shamus helped with getting utilities turned on and other aspects of moving, including the delivery on a new bed.

Marlon and Tigger were happily reunited.

One remaining problem was that Marlon didn't have any furniture other than his bed, but a solution soon presented itself. Another one of our clients was ill and planned to move in with relatives. He wanted to donate his furniture, so Shamus, Arlene, and her two sons moved his furniture to Marlon's apartment.

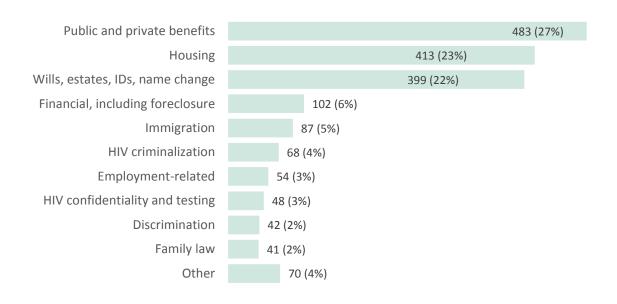
"He was excited about a new start," Shamus said. "It was a much better environment to be in."



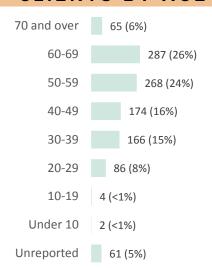
LEGAL SERVICES IN 2024

In 2024, the AIDS Law Project worked on 1,807 cases for 1,113 clients.

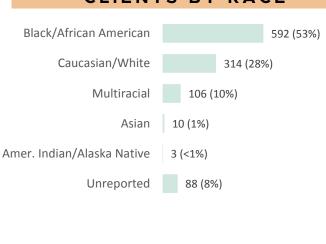
LEGAL ISSUES WORKED ON BY TYPE







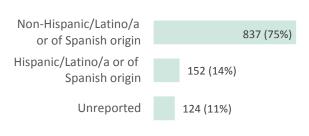
CLIENTS BY RACE



CLIENTS BY GENDER

Male* 635 (57%) Female** 401 (36%) Transgender - non-binary 23 (2%) *Includes 29 who identify as transgender. Unreported 54 (5%) **Includes 69 who identify as transgender.

CLIENTS BY ETHNICITY



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THE AIDS LAW PROJECT AT WORK

Not A Crime - Not Today, Not Ever

HIV Is Not a Crime Awareness Day was Feb. 28 and activists descended on Philadelphia City Hall.

Philadelphia's elected officials and community leaders know that punishing people simply because they have a virus does not make anyone safe and only contributes to the stigma facing people living with HIV. And stigma fuels the HIV epidemic.

Their message was simple – today and every day HIV Is Not A Crime.



Proudly wearing "HIV Is Not A Crime" buttons are, from left, Larry Krasner, Philadelphia District Attorney; Ronda Goldfein, AIDS Law Project; Keisha Hudson (Chief Defender) and Andrew Pappas (Manager Pretrial) of the Defender Association of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia City Councilmember **Rue Landau**, center, and supporters after she introduced a resolution designating Feb. 28 as HIV Is Not a Crime Awareness Day.



State Lawmakers Move To End Criminalization

Two bills have been introduced in the Pennsylvania legislature that would remove the last reference to HIV in the Pennsylvania Criminal Code.

Prostitution is a misdemeanor in Pennsylvania, unless the person charged has HIV, and then it's a felony, even if there was no physical contact.

"Enhancing misdemeanor charges to a felony serves no legitimate law enforcement purpose and instead perpetuates stigma, which is a driver of the epidemic," said Ronda B. Goldfein, executive director of the AIDS Law Project.

Sen. Vincent Hughes and Rep. Ben Waxman have introduced bills in their respective chambers that would remove the felony upgrade. Each bill has numerous cosponsors and has been referred to the Judiciary committees

of each chamber.

The House Judiciary Committee has scheduled a hearing on the bill on June 2. The Senate hearing has not been scheduled.

HIV activists are encouraging people to attend the hearing and voice their support for the bill.

The bills were also introduced last year but no action was taken by the end of the session.

Good Counsel / Spring 2025

INSIDE THE AIDS LAW PROJECT



Beth LaPiene Joins Board of Directors

The AIDS Law Project is honored that **Beth LaPiene** joined our board of directors in 2024.

She is an Assistant General Counsel at Temple University Health System, where she supports initiatives related to population health, research, ethics, and patient safety.

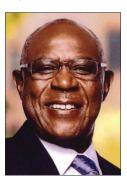
Beth earned a MSPH in Health Policy & Management from UNC-Chapel Hill. Upon moving to Philadelphia in 2011, she began a decade-long career as a hospital administrator. She continued working full-time while attending Temple University's Beasley School of Law's evening program, earning her degree in 2022.

Her law school coursework and internships focused on legal and healthcare issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community and included a practicum at Philadelphia FIGHT. Beth is admitted to practice in Pennsylvania.

The AIDS Law Project also sends best wishes to Beth and her wife **Sarah Hunter**, who were married May 2 at the Wyck Historic House & Garden in Germantown.

Longtime Board Member Honored Posthumously

At right, **Phoebe Haddon**, chancellor emerita and professor of law at Rutgers University - Camden, thanks the Philadelphia Bar



Foundation for its
Trailblazer Award
given posthumously to her husband,
Frank McClellan,
professor at Temple
University Beasley
School of Law, as
their daughter Cara
McClellan and his
sons Malik and Toussant look on. Frank
served on the board

of the AIDS Law Project for more than two decades before he passed away in 2023.



Collaborative

Continued from Page 1

process. Please check your spam folder if you don't receive the listserv welcome email.

Once you are added to the Collab 2.0 group, you can post to it by emailing pa-hiv-policy-collab@googlegroups.

com. We want to hear from you. Collab 2.0 is intended for public advocacy work. Do not share client-specific matters.

Requests for legal assistance can be made online at: https://www.aidslaw-pa.org/need-legal-help/ or by calling 215-587-9377, M-F 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

We are not vetting subscribers and

expect all will be allies. But as a word of internet caution, do not share information you would not want disclosed beyond our network.

The AIDS Law Project wishes to thank our interns **Liam Sliva**, Temple Class of 2029 and **Joelle Williams**, Harvard Class of 2026, for their brain power in launching the listserv.

6 www.aidslawpa.org

FROM THE COVER

Federal Circuit Court Hears Safehouse Appeal

Legal Battle Still Unresolved After Six Years

The long-running lawsuit to prevent Safehouse from opening an overdose prevention center in Philadelphia continued at a hearing April 9 before the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Philadelphia first sued Safehouse in 2019 after it announced plans to open an overdose prevention center.

Safehouse is appealing a 2024 federal district court decision rejecting its right to exercise its religious beliefs by saving lives.

Ronda B. Goldfein, executive

director of the AIDS Law Project and vice president of Safehouse, said the opioid overdose crisis has continued unabated throughout the legal battle.

"It's been six years since Safehouse was sued by the federal government," Ronda said. "Close to 10,000 people have died of overdose in Philadelphia, as this case has been winding through the legal system."

Ilana H. Eisenstein, of DLA Piper LLP (US), argued Safehouse's position before a three-judge panel in Pittsburgh.

Tattoo

Continued from Page 1

"They double downed every time," Adrian said.

Adrian and Ronda B. Goldfein, executive director of the AIDS Law Project, filed a complaint with the PHRC alleging a violation of the state's anti-discrimination law. The PHRC found probable cause that illegal discrimination occurred and set a hearing date in July 2024. In preparation for the hearing, the AIDS Law Project called Dr. Luis Montaner of the Wistar Institute as an expert witness to testify how HIV is transmitted and how transmission can be prevented.

Dr. Montaner's videotaped deposition was played at the hearing, reiterating that as long as universal precautions are followed people living with HIV are not a risk in the workplace.

At the public hearing, Adrian and Ronda represented John and Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Deputy Chief Counsel Morgan Williams and Deputy Assistant Chief Counsel

Michelle L. Smith represented the interests of the Commonwealth.

On Jan. 29, 2025, the Commission issued an order finding that the tattoo shop discriminated against our client because he is living with HIV, in violation of state law.

"John felt vindicated and proud, and we are proud of him for calling out injustice when he experienced it," Adrian said.

The Order provides that the tattoo shop:

- Cease and desist from discriminating against individuals due to their disability.
- Pay \$5,000 as compensatory damages for the embarrassment and humiliation he suffered.
- Pay \$1,000 to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission as a civil penalty.

To read the order go to https://www.aidslawpa.org/.../2025/01/BR-v-Hettinger.pdf.

ABOUT US

WHAT WE DO

The AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania is a nonprofit, public-interest law firm. We publish *Good Counsel* semiannually for our friends, volunteers and colleagues committed to protecting the rights of people with HIV and those at risk of HIV. Last year, we worked on about 2,000 legal issues, nearly all from people with HIV. 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 professionals who work with people living with HIV.

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Gifts received October 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025

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