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HIV/AIDS News and Issues

Change is Here

HIV and AIDS and the Obama Administration

The just a few short months, the Obama administration has demonstrated an increased commitment to issues surrounding HIV and AIDS. In February President Obama appointed Jeffrey Crowley as Director of National AIDS Policy. According to a February 26, 2009, press release, "[t]he Office of National AIDS Policy (ONAP) is the White House Office tasked with coordinating the continuing efforts of the government to reduce the number of HIV infections across the United States." Mr. Crowley was a Senior Research Scholar at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute and had previously served as the Deputy Executive Director for Programs at the National Association of People With AIDS.

On April 7, 2009, the Act Against AIDS Leadership Initiative was launched by President Obama and the Department of Health and Human Services and was the President's only health initiative presented in his first one hundred days of his administration. The Initiative

included the first national domestic HIV/AIDS public service campaign in twenty years, with an initial focus on the African American community. In July 2009, the ONAP announced that the Obama administration had begun the process of developing a National HIV/AIDS strategy and that the development of such a strategy was the President's "highest domestic HIV/AIDS priority." According to the White House, a national AIDS strategy would develop recommendations for significantly "reducing HIV incidence; increasing access to care for people living with HIV/AIDS and improving health outcomes; and, reducing HIV-related health disparities." The ONAP will conduct town hall meetings to assist in the development of this strategy with the goal of releasing it in early 2010.

This renewed national government support has brought HIV/AIDS once again to the forefront of the national political scene and gives us at AIDS Law hope that progress will be made in preventing and curing this

HIV and Travel into the U.S.

Equity to HIV Positive Travellers

HIV infection has been grounds for barring entry of travelers and immigrants to the U.S. since 1987. The U.S. is one of only twelve countries, including Armenia, Iraq, Libya, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan that restrict entry of HIV-positive non-citizens into their country. In 2008, the legal requirement that HIV infection is grounds for barring entry was repealed. A draft rule to remove HIV infection from the list of communicable diseases of public

health significance was published July 2nd. Along with removing HIV infection as grounds for entry into the U.S., this rule also removes HIV testing from any required medical examination for visa applicants and immigrants. AIDS Law will be following the promulgation of this rule as we contemplate adding immigration law to our field of practice.



AIDS Law Mourns the Passing of Karl Rumbaugh

For almost eight years, it was my pleasure to be Karl Rumbaugh's supervisor at AIDS Law. Karl was sick the whole time he worked there, but he never let his health problems get in the way of his work, particularly as a dedicated advocate for our clients. The small salary Karl would accept came back to us in the form of donations and extra work off the clock. He was wonderfully organized and took on every project with a fixed devotion to see that the job got done. Karl could get feisty at times (his notes to warn off those who might take his Hi-Liters were classics), but he was quick to admit his shortcomings and always tried to make amends. He was a great colleague and he will be missed. - *Former Executive Director and Pro Bono Award Recipient, Linton Carney*

STATISTICS ABOUT HIV AND AIDS

(From Louisiana Office of Public Health, as of June 30, 2009 unless otherwise indicated.)

- As of June 30, 2009, a cumulative total of 29,241 HIV/AIDS cases have been reported in Louisiana.
- A total of 16,760 persons are living with HIV/AIDS in Louisiana; of these, 53% have an AIDS diagnosis.
- Nationally, Louisiana ranked 5th highest in AIDS case rates and 11th in the number of AIDS cases diagnosed in 2007, according to the CDC 2007 HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report.
- New Orleans ranked 2nd for AIDS case rates among the largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. in 2007; Baton Rouge ranked 3rd.
- In 2008, 1,173 new HIV cases were diagnosed in Louisiana.
- In 2008, 860 new AIDS cases were diagnosed in Louisiana.
- In Louisiana, 33% of new HIV cases and 34% of new AIDS cases are among women.
- HIV continues to disproportionately affect African Americans in Louisiana. In 2008, 72% of newly diagnosed HIV cases and 70% of newly diagnosed AIDS cases were among African Americans.
- Every 9 ½ minutes another American is infected with HIV. (CDC study)



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Supervising Attorney
Stacy Morris
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THANKS! Everyone at AIDS Law wants to extend thanks to the many friends and supporters who have given generously to make sure that AIDS Law continues its work. As long as fear and bias are salient traits of the AIDS epidemic, members of the affected community will need AIDS Law's (and your) help if they are to be treated with dignity and fairness in the legal arena. Your support makes important legal protections a right rather than a dream.

Listed below are our latest membership-level donors. We thank them for their support and invite you to join them. A reply envelope has been included for your convenience and outlines the giving levels.

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Arthur Crais Jr.
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Will Sibbald and Leland Brown
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Currents

Summer 2009

A Newsletter for Friends of AIDS Law of Louisiana

Vol. 13, No. 1

Baton Rouge Welcomes AIDS Law With Open Arms

On June 2nd we inaugurated the first AIDS Law office outside of New Orleans with a ribbon cutting at our new Baton Rouge location. We, especially our staff attorney Louise, and all of our Baton Rouge clients are so pleased to have a permanent presence there.

While our new intake specialist Tammie Gosa had been working hard and making the office a cozy home for AIDS Law since late April, we welcomed fellow AIDS service organizations, supporters and press to see our wonderful new satellite office.



AIDS Law staff and Board President Jeff Brinkman prepare to cut the ribbon at the new Baton Rouge office.

Board members, the entire New Orleans staff, and around 30 friends, neighbors and supporters joined us for the special event. The ribbon cutting and luncheon were a huge success and it was amazing to feel so welcomed while we establish ourselves in the capital city.



Executive Director Stacey LaFleur welcomes visitors to the new Baton Rouge Office.

The ribbon cutting was followed by a cocktail reception at the Baton Rouge Bar Association. The reception offered AIDS Law staff and board members a chance to get to know more members of the Baton Rouge community.

Although we have been serving Baton Rouge clients since 1995, in some ways we are still the new kids on the block, but we were warmly received and made a lot of new friends. We look forward to being more of a presence in Baton Rouge and anticipate building even more long lasting relationships in the area.

AIDS Law is happy to now call our wonderful new office space at 4560 North Boulevard, Suite 118, home.

AIDSLaw and Advocacy

This year AIDSLaw was the recipient of two National AIDS Fund (NAF) grants, which were funded through the Ford Foundation and the Elton John AIDS Fund. The NAF had its Southern Programs Grantee meeting in New Orleans in mid-July with a focus on organizing and advocating for policy change. With topics like “Advocacy on a Shoestring Budget”



and small group sessions comprised of attendees from other agencies in Louisiana, the conference was a great way to start thinking of how AIDSLaw can expand its advocacy efforts.

As a legal organization, AIDSLaw advocates daily for the clients we serve. Another way that AIDSLaw can effectuate change through the legal system is to write or sign onto Amicus Curiae or “friend of the court” briefs. These are briefs filed in cases where we are not a party, but where we can nonetheless offer information on a point of law to assist the court in making a decision. Recently AIDSLaw signed onto

an amicus brief written by the attorneys at the Center for HIV Law and Policy (CHLP). This amicus brief was to support the case of an HIV-positive pregnant woman from Cameroon who had her sentence extended beyond the federal sentencing guidelines because the judge feared that otherwise she would transmit HIV to her child. We support CHLP’s argument that it was not the legislative intent of the federal sentencing guidelines to include departures based on pregnancy, HIV status, or protection of the “unborn”.

AIDSLaw is a member of the Louisiana AIDS Advocacy Network (LAAN), and through this organization we are able to work with other advocates around the state to see that state lawmakers are attuned to what is going on with HIV and AIDS in Louisiana. As a member of LAAN’s board, AIDSLaw director Stacey LaFleur is able to assist this organization in determining what issues are important to those living with HIV in this state. This is another way for AIDSLaw to affect change to laws that have a direct or ancillary effect on our clients.

Comings and Goings

Tammie Gosa, Baton Rouge Office Operations and Intake Specialist, has been an outstanding addition to the AIDSLaw family. She comes to us with 15 years of medical, HIV/AIDS prevention and community work. More than that, Tammie brings boundless positive energy and has helped enormously in establishing our Baton Rouge office. Clients and partner organizations have embraced Tammie at our new Baton Rouge office.



Gail Anderson, AIDSLaw’s Fund Development Coordinator, joined the AIDSLaw staff part-time, this spring. She is a recent Chicago transplant and brings with her an excitement for New Orleans, enthusiasm for all things Louisiana and an energy for the AIDSLaw mission. Gail is focused on

diversifying the funding base, making our events as memorable as possible and developing AIDSLaw’s brand and image within the community. Feel free to contact her, even if it’s just to say hello.

AIDSLaw attorneys **Iska Beck** and **Lisa Mirman** left the agency this year. After devoting nearly 13 years as supervising attorney to AIDSLaw, Iska Beck is now having a chance to relax and enjoy retirement. Lisa Mirman, a former law clerk and staff attorney for the past 3 ½ years, has moved on to a better career opportunity as an attorney for the Social Security Administration. They have both been zealous advocates for our clients and respected representatives of AIDSLaw, building and maintaining strong relationships with AIDS Service Organizations in New Orleans and throughout the state. Lisa learned the intricacies of the Social Security application and appeal process from Iska, and together they helped countless clients obtain crucial benefits, and addressed other HIV/AIDS related legal issues. Their contributions have played a huge part in AIDSLaw’s success. They will be missed by their clients and colleagues. AIDSLaw is thankful to Iska and Lisa for their hard work and service and we wish them the best.

AIDSLaw is also happy to welcome **Stacy Morris, Supervising Attorney**, and **Jevan Fleming, Staff Attorney**. Please see the **Executive Director’s Message** to learn more about these new team members



Tammie Gosa (right) with Louise Bienvenu (left) and Stacey LaFleur at the Baton Rouge Office Grand Opening

It Takes a Village



In the mid-90’s the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” became popular. As we approach the fourth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina I have been reflecting on how far we have come in four years and have realized that we could not have survived as an organization without the assistance of our community partners and supporters.

Prior to Katrina, AIDSLaw’s office had been located for several years in the 144 Elk Place building. However, this building sustained substantial damage and we were unable to return to this location. Like so many New Orleanians, AIDSLaw was homeless. In the chaotic post-Katrina resettlement, former AIDSLaw Supervising Attorney Iska Beck began seeing clients at the HOP Clinic, a benefit to our mutual clients that continues to this day. Thanks to the wonderful generosity of the board and staff of NO/AIDS Task Force, particularly Executive Director, Noel Twilbeck, AIDSLaw did find a home. This arrangement worked wonderfully for both agencies and our mutual clients.

As AIDSLaw increased its services and enlarged its staff, we began to outgrow our space. In May we moved to our new home conveniently located at 3801 Canal Street, Suite 331, in New Orleans’ Mid-City neighborhood. Now each employee has their own office, our files are in one central location in the office, and we again have our own reception area. Recognizing that our location at NO/AIDS was mutually beneficial to our clients who receive services there, AIDSLaw continues to maintain office hours at NO/AIDS Mondays from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and Thursdays from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. for income affidavits.

Through a National AIDS Fund Grant we were able to make our paralegal, Christal Hurst, full-time in March. Christal has also taken the Louisiana Notary exam and has been trained to assist clients with filing Social Security disability initial applications. The addition of another notary will allow AIDSLaw to serve many more clients.



Supervising Attorney Stacy Morris

This summer has seen the addition of two attorneys to AIDSLaw staff. In mid-May we welcomed Stacy Morris on board as our supervising attorney. Ms. Morris comes to AIDSLaw with several years

experience in handling Social Security Disability appeals.

She was able to hit the ground running with a number of current cases and has already proven herself to be a valuable addition to the staff. Jevan Fleming started her employment as a staff attorney with AIDSLaw on July 21st. Ms. Fleming has over ten years of experience practicing law, primarily in insurance defense, toxic torts and general civil litigation.



Staff Attorney Jevan Fleming

AIDSLaw has benefited from the assistance of two law clerks this summer.



AIDSLaw law clerks Jared Skidmore and Cody Cervantes

Jared Skidmore, who is originally from West Virginia, will be a Third Year law student at Loyola Law School this coming year. Cody Cervantes was the recipient of a Public Interest Law Foundation (PILF) grant from Tulane and is about to enter his second year of law school. Cody and Jared have assisted AIDSLaw attorneys by conducting client intake, performing research, drafting memorandum, and observing Social Security hearings.

We hope to continue to be able to grow as we endeavor to meet our clients’ needs. However, we will only be able to do so with the continued assistance of our community partners and our supporters.

Help us make a difference in our clients’ lives. Please consider joining our NO/AIDS Walk team, donating to AIDSLaw, or become a board member or referral attorney.

We cannot do it without you.

It takes a village.

Stacey LaFleur
Executive Director

AIDSLaw’s Annual Pro Bono Publico Celebration

article contributed by Board Chair Jeff Brinkman

AIDSLaw hosted another successful Pro Bono Awards on March 12, 2009 at the Big Top Gallery on Clio Street. The event highlighted the incredible work of several individuals who have helped with the mission and work of the organization.

The recipients of this year's Pro Bono Awards, which honors individuals who have exhibited continuous dedication and hours of service to the organization, were:

- **A. Gerald Pelayo**, former AIDSLaw Board chair and member. He has been a constant supporter of the organization and the cause. He strove to improve staff benefits and assisted the office during times of crisis. Pelayo helped move the AIDSLaw office after Hurricane Katrina and stored office files and equipment in his home after the storm.



Event MC Mike Theis (right) praises Linton Carney's (center) work along with Board Chair Jeff Brinkman (left)

- **Chad Youngblood**, an AIDSLaw referral attorney. Chad has enthusiastically accepted referrals from AIDSLaw on cases that the organization is unable to handle. For example, he represented a client who was employed by a local grocery chain, without cost, as she fought to secure reasonable medical accommodations for her HIV status. He has also worked as a pro bono attorney for local military families.

- AIDSLaw also honored **Kathleen Lincoln** with the Teri Estrada Award, which is dedicated to the memory of Teri Estrada, a former staff attorney in the early 1990s who fought relentlessly to secure access to benefits, health care, and other services for her clients until her death from AIDS in 1994. Kathleen Lincoln served as program director for the HOP (HIV Outpatient) Clinic at LSU from 2002 until her unfortunate death earlier this year. Under her leadership, the clinic was able to greatly expand its services, particularly in the areas of staff support and outreach and marketing. Kathleen amazingly secured medical services for HOP Clinic patients in Baton Rouge a mere two weeks after Hurricane Katrina. She also opened up her home as the site for the clinic's administrative office after the storm. Kathleen passed away from a prolonged battle with cancer just days after the Pro Bono Awards Event, but her determination and spirit of advocacy will continue to inspire her co-workers and clinic patients. We are proud to have had the opportunity to honor her while she was still living and honor her legacy for so many her work has helped.



Staff and friends of Kathleen Lincoln and the HOP Clinic offer a touching tribute to Kathleen Lincoln's dedication and receive the Teri Estrada Award on Ms. Lincoln's behalf

AIDSLaw would like to thank its staff, Board of Directors, Odyssey House for the wonderful food and snacks, the Big Top (3 Ring Productions) for hosting the event, and most important, the attendees who continue to support the organization.