$90K Settlement in HIV Discrimination Case Against Sheriff's Office

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April 23, 2020 By Trent Straube

A sheriff's office in Louisiana agreed to pay $90,000 in damages in an HIV discrimination lawsuit. The case involves former police officer William "Liam" Pierce, who was offered a job as a sheriff's deputy in Iberia Parish only to have it rescinded after he acknowledged he had HIV.

"I immediately knew that the sheriff's decision not to hire me was based on my HIV status, and though it was a long journey, it feels good to finally be vindicated," Pierce said in a press release from Lambda Legal, the national advocacy group that represented him.

As part of the settlement, the sheriff's office will conduct training about HIV and discrimination, including aspects of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA prohibits public entities from discriminating against people who have disabilities, including HIV.

Pierce applied for the job in 2012. His qualifications included previous work as a paramedic, a police officer and a volunteer firefighter. He had moved to Louisiana in 2005 after leaving Ohio to help in relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina.

According to Lambda Legal, after Pierce was offered the job, he noted his HIV status while undergoing a medical examination, but he noted that it didn't affect his ability to perform his duties. Nonetheless, the sheriff's office reneged on its offer.

"This settlement is a lesson to all employers across the country that HIV discrimination in the workplace is completely unlawful and has no place anywhere. Someone's HIV status is absolutely irrelevant to their ability to safely perform a job, from the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office to the U.S. Air Force, and using it to deny employment or promotion is discrimination pure and simple," said Scott Schoettes, counsel and HIV project director at Lambda Legal in the press statement. "This settlement should also serve as a wake-up call to states and cities across the country to remove once and for all outdated and stigmatizing HIV criminalization laws that perpetuate discrimination and ignore current medical science."

To learn more about the ADA, call the toll-free ADA information line at 800-514-0301 or

800-514-0383, or visit ADA.gov. The Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission help enforce and investigate claims involving the ADA.

Lambda Legal is a national organization that fights for the rights of LGBT people and everyone living with HIV. To read a POZ profile on the group, read "Making the Case for Equality."

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