Advocates Seek an End to HIV Criminalization

April 2, 2012 By Cristina Gonzalez

A coalition of advocacy groups is throwing support behind a bill introduced by U.S. Representative Barbara Lee (D–Calif.) to review and repeal criminal laws that target HIV-positive people. Currently, 34 states have criminal laws that punish people for exposing another person to HIV, whether or not HIV transmission occurs—and no, laws generally don't consider condom use as a defense against prosecution. Lee's bill would give states an incentive to reform these laws.

"Although our country has made notable advances in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, we have a long way to go," Lee says. "The decriminalization of HIV/AIDS is one way we can reduce stigma in our communities while fighting the epidemic in a rational, holistic and truly rights-based fashion."

Some prosecutors argue for modified versions of HIV criminalization laws, but activists are uniting behind Lee's bill for the health and well-being of the community.

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