Is Stoning Next?

Judge orders hustler to air HIV on TV

February 1, 1999 By Scott Hess

As part of a court-ordered plea bargain, an HIV positive cross-dressing prostitute tattled on TV and urged his ex-johns to get tested. For agreeing to face the cameras last November, Cleveland sex worker Tony Brown, 37, copped 18 months behind bars with possible probation -- as opposed to five years -- for attempted soliciting with the knowledge that he has HIV.

After Brown told Judge Shirley Strickland Saffold he kept hustling for six months after finding out his HIV status and disclosed to only some of his tricks, she bumped his original misdemeanor charge to a felony, and ordered the boob-tube bargain to “protect the public’s safety.” ACLU staff attorney Jennifer Middleton said, “The judge is sending the wrong public health message. She put the onus on Brown to inform his partners, taking any burden off people who solicit prostitutes. It could be dangerous.” She added, “It won’t set legal precedents, but it could be an example to other judges.”

A spokesperson for the Cleveland health department said the office did not receive any calls immediately following Brown’s forced public humiliation on the NBC-affiliate WKYC-TV 3’s nightly newscast. After Brown -- dressed in prison garb -- read his courtroom statement, reporter Phil Hayes took to the street corner where Brown had worked. An exchange between Hayes and anchor Ramona Robinson follows:

Robinson: “Are police seeing much of this type of thing?”

Hayes: “Actually, Ramona, unfortunately they are. The street-crimes people say that out here they’ve seen in the last six months about 10 different people they’ve had to charge with the same sort of crime, people that knew, uh, that they had, uh, the HIV positive virus.”

Robinson: “That’s disturbing. Thank you, Phil.”

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