



It's All Connected

In a blog post titled “[Why HINAC Is the HIV Event We Desperately Need](#),” POZ contributing writer Mark S. King urges anyone interested in learning more about HIV criminalization to attend. Below is an edited excerpt.

March 27, 2023 By [Mark S. King](#)

The issue of HIV criminalization used to intimidate me because I didn't understand state laws, much less how to change them.

Thank God I got a scholarship to the Sero Project's first HIV Is Not a Crime Training Academy (HINAC) in 2014. It opened my eyes and introduced me to dedicated, kick-ass activists, most of them living with HIV, who showed me how they were already rolling back dangerous statutes that are prosecuting and jailing people for no other reason than their HIV status. And yes, this grotesque injustice is going on right here in the United States.

The next HINAC is taking place from June 4 to 7. I urge anyone with any level of knowledge of this issue or who wants to get an education about it to consider attending. Trust me when I tell you that HINAC is a life-changing experience, focused on real education and interaction, where you will meet people whom you will know and admire for the rest of your life. Yes. Really.

My favorite part of HINAC is how it is very deliberately unlike any other conference you might have attended. There is no swanky host hotel. There are no Big Pharma gift bags or ballroom-sized catered lunches. Instead, HINAC is held on the campus of a university, where we all stay in dorm rooms and eat in the cafeteria. If that sounds like roughing it to you, maybe it is. Give in. You'll love it.

Look, I'm as bougie as the next privileged gay guy, but I have been to every in-person HINAC and always had a blast. You won't be clicking through Netflix selections in your hotel room. You'll be laughing with, and learning from, all your new friends in the middle of a college campus.

Most people know HIV criminalization from biased news stories of people who didn't disclose their HIV status to partners—stories that usually don't mention that the person living with HIV was undetectable or used other protection or otherwise did not expose their partner to HIV or the very complicated issue of HIV disclosure—but it's so much more than that.

If you're living with HIV and get arrested for something unrelated to your status, criminal charges

could be heightened simply because of the virus in your body.

And get this. Right now, Tennessee is going through an HIV funding nightmare because the state is cutting off its own federal funding from the Ending the Epidemic initiative just so it can limit money to Planned Parenthood, which provides HIV services, and other similar groups. The state is willing to walk away from millions and millions of dollars in HIV funding just to make a political statement.

What does this have to do with HIV criminalization? The county in Tennessee that will suffer the greatest loss of funding is Shelby County. And Shelby County is also the place where the largest number of people living with HIV have been prosecuted. It's all connected. Go figure.

There's so much more to say, but you can find out more about criminalization and HINAC on the Sero Project's website ([SeroProject.com](https://seroproject.com)) and Facebook page ([Facebook.com/TheSeroProject](https://facebook.com/TheSeroProject)).

This year, HINAC will be held at Emory & Henry College in Emory, Virginia. Sero's presenting partner organizations are THRIVE SS, U.S. PLHIV Caucus, Positively Trans and the Positive Women's Network-USA.