Explore Updated Maps and Data on HIV Crime Laws

Plus: The Center for HIV Law and Policy celebrates 20 years and debuts its Urvashi Vaid Visionary Justice Award.

February 25, 2025 By Trent Straube

With three noteworthy events, this is a big week for HIV criminalization. What's more, it kicks off a milestone year for CHLP (the Center for HIV Law and Policy), which celebrates 20 years of fighting to end unjust HIV crime laws.

First off, CHLP has updated its maps tracking HIV criminalization in the United States. A webinar on Wednesday, February 26, explains how the data were revised and highlights the maps' new features.

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On Thursday, CHLP marks two decades of “making positive justice possible” with a CHLP20, a celebration in New York City at which the inaugural Urvashi Vaid Visionary Justice Award will be presented. Named after the LGBTQ rights lawyer, philanthropic leader and social justice visionary, this award will go to CHLP founding executive director Catherine Hanssens for her trailblazing contributions to the fight against HIV criminalization. This will be the first of several events throughout the year to celebrate the anniversary. Click here for more information.

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Then, Friday marks the annual HIV Is Not a Crime Awareness Day (#HINACDay; #HIVIsNotACrime). Held each February 28, the global effort “is an opportunity to amplify the voices of those who have been criminalized based on their HIV status” and is also “a day to support advocates mobilizing to change laws during their legislative session that target people living with HIV,” according to event organizers The Sero Project, (a nonprofit that fights HIV crime laws), the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation and other global HIV advocacy groups.

HIV criminalization refers to the use of unfair laws to target people who have HIV—notably, African-American, Latino and LGBTQ people and women—and to punish them because of their HIV status, not because of their actions. Under outdated laws, people with HIV can be sentenced to prison in cases where HIV was not transmitted and their only crime was allegedly not disclosing their status.

It should be noted that repealing HIV laws does not mean that people can’t be held accountable for intentionally transmitting HIV. Other laws may apply to the situation.

Many HIV laws were passed in the early days of the epidemic, when fear and lack of scientific knowledge about the virus reigned. Fast-forward four decades, and today we know, for instance, that people with HIV who take their meds and maintain an undetectable viral load do not transmit the virus sexually, a fact referred to as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, or U=U.

Does your state enforce outdated HIV-specific criminal laws? To share this vital information and to support efforts to update such laws, CHLP created a map of HIV criminalization in the United States. To learn more about the latest update on the soon-to-be unveiled map, join Wednesday's webinar. Here's the description:

> Visualizing the Threat to Our Communities: New HIV Criminalization Maps from the Center for HIV Law and Policy
>
> February 26, 2025 12:30 p.m.
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> As our understanding of the scope and impact of HIV criminalization continues to expand, the tools we use to talk about the issue must also evolve. With the newest and most substantial update to the Map of HIV Criminalization in the United States, CHLP's Positive Justice Project aims to accurately represent the threat of HIV criminalization while improving the accessibility of our data and resources. On February 26 at 11:30 a.m. CT/12:30 p.m. ET, for HIV is Not a Crime Day, CHLP's Kytara Epps, Jada Hicks and Sean McCormick will discuss the update process and highlight important features of the new maps, including key definitions and concepts. Attendees will also have the opportunity to provide input and ask questions.

In the news release for its anniversary, CHLP describes itself as "the first national legal and policy resource center for advocates protecting and defending the rights of people living with and affected by HIV. From its inception, CHLP has worked in close partnership with HIV advocates and prioritized addressing the impact of HIV on LGBTQ+ people and Black and brown communities. Through its pioneering HIV decriminalization work, strategic legal and policy challenges and its dedication to bringing an abolitionist lens to this work, CHLP has always been at the vanguard of HIV legal theory and thought throughout its 20-year history."

"As we mark this milestone, our mission remains as urgent as ever," said CHLP's executive director S. Mandisa Moore-O'Neal. "We are still radical, intersectional and community-based lawyers, public health strategists and policy experts moving into 2025 with a sharper lens and a deepened resolve. Advocating for freedom from criminalization, championing bodily autonomy and upholding abolitionist values are part of CHLP's foundation and will continue to guide our work ahead."

For a roundup of related topics in POZ, click #Criminalization. You'll find headlines such as:

- "Positive Destinations: HIV Justice Network Rebrands HIV-Specific Travel Guide,"

- “Conservative Lawmaker Pushes to Repeal Ohio’s HIV Criminalization Laws,”
- “People With HIV Have Been Arrested in Indiana for Donating Plasma,”
- “Black Men Make Up Almost Half of HIV Crime Cases in Mississippi” and
- “Nashville Agrees to Rewrite Policies Disqualifying HIV-Positive Police Candidates.”

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