State Law Allows HIV Disclosure of Recently Deceased

Oklahoma's governor signed the bill despite objections from LGBT advocates.

May 22, 2020 By Trent Straube

A new law in Oklahoma requires that anyone handling the remains of an HIV-positive person—such as medical personnel and funeral directors—be informed of the decedent's HIV status.

Written by Republican House Speaker Charles McCall, the bill was signed by Governor Kevin Stitt earlier this month, reports Public Radio Tulsa.

LGBT advocates asked Stitt to veto the bill, saying not only that it could lead to discrimination but also that it was not needed because existing guidelines already require people to treat all human remains respectfully and as though potentially contaminated.

"There are already so many guidelines in place for the safety of people who are handling human bodies and human remains," Allie Shinn, of the LGBT group Freedom Oklahoma, told the radio station. "What this law would do is not make anybody safer," Shinn said. "What it would do is lead to incidents of discrimination and revive tired stereotypes and stigmas that will harm people living with HIV."

In other HIV-related news, Oklahoma was one of seven states to receive additional federal resources last year because of its high rates of HIV in rural areas. The funding is part of a national initiative President Trump launched in 2019. For more details, read "Plans to End the HIV Epidemic at Home and Abroad" and "The Cherokee Nation Partners on a Plan to End the HIV Epidemic."

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