Hall Monitor

Despite activist cries, a state law requiring the disclosure of students' HIV-positive status hangs on.

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HIV/AIDS advocates in Illinois are blasting the state legislature, which in March voted to keep a 1987 law requiring the Illinois Department of Health or the state's local health departments to disclose the status of HIV-positive children to school principals and superintendents. The advocates say the law not only stigmatizes positive students but encourages other students to avoid potentially lifesaving HIV testing. "It's so sad that people are still reacting out of this gut-level aversion to people with HIV," says Ann Hilton Fisher, executive director of the AIDS Legal Council of Chicago (ALCC).

Since the statute is a state law, it doesn't violate the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which protects medical confidentiality. Illinois is one of 15 states whose laws address HIV status disclosure—but it's the only one mandating that school principals be notified.

Fisher says that all Illinois schools follow standardized precautions to prevent the spread of any blood-borne disease, adding that she thinks the disclosure law recalls the stigma surrounding another Midwestern student: Ryan White.

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