A Tour to Educate Black Gay and Bi Men About Updated HIV Crime Laws

"Sex, Hooking Up and the Apps" forums will take place in five cities across Michigan.

August 28, 2019 By Trent Straube

Michigan reformed its HIV crime laws less than a year ago, and a series of community forums in five cities aims to inform Black gay and bisexual men about the updates, reports Between the Lines, which is part of Pride Source Media Group. The forums will also provide an opportunity for attendees to discuss how the broader issues of politics, culture and LGBT rights affect local Black communities.

Organized by LGBT Detroit, the forums are part of a tour called "Sex, Hooking Up and the Apps," scheduled from September 11 through 15 in Flint, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing and Ypsilanti.

"A lot has happened to Black gay men that impacted how they relate to one another, a great deal of it informed by the ravages of HIV on our community and by policies that once made the intimacies between men illegal and socially unacceptable, whether positive or not," Jerron Totten, LGBT Detroit's social outreach coordinator, told PrideSource. "No one has really explored what strain or impact these laws and policies, both regressive and progressive, have put on Black gay men's idea of themselves, the way they have sex or don't and on the way they trust.... We hope these candid discussions with our community begin to correct that."

The reform of Michigan's HIV crime laws was successfully introduced by Representative Jon Hoadley (D–Kalamazoo) and signed into law by then-Governor Snyder on December 27, 2018. As the HIV Justice Network reported on the updates:

> "Previously, a person living with HIV (PLHIV) could face a felony up to 4 years in prison for not disclosing their HIV status prior to any type of sexual penetration. The degree of risk of HIV transmission was not a factor in the statute; including circumstances where there was no HIV transmission, nor even any risk of HIV transmission.
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> "The amended law removes those living with HIV who are on treatment and virally suppressed—posing no risk of transmitting HIV—from being subject to prosecution. It also narrows the scope of sexual activities subject to prosecution, from "any type of sexual penetration to only "vaginal and anal sex." Oral sex, which poses no or negligible risk of transmission regardless of whether the person with HIV is on treatment or virally suppressed,

is no longer subject to prosecution.

"For PLHIV who are not on treatment and not virally suppressed, it remains a felony if they do not disclose and do transmit HIV sexually. If they do not disclose and do not transmit, the penalty has been reduced to a misdemeanor in the amended statute. Any person with a "specific intent" to infect another person also remains subject to prosecution."

"The new reforms aren't perfect, but they are a start in significantly reducing the stigma associated with having HIV and begin to factor into the equation both the science and the real world sexual and relationship experiences of people living with the virus," LGBT Detroit executive director Curtis Lipscomb told the newspaper. "The benefits here are real."

In related POZ news, read "Why Are HIV Rates Four Times Higher in Detroit Than in Michigan?" And for a collection of articles, click #Criminalization.

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