# Turmoil and Transitions at the Black AIDS Institute

Discord surfaced when the board announced that Raniyah Copeland would no longer serve as president and CEO

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Founded in 1999, the Black AIDS Institute remains the nation's premier HIV advocacy group for African Americans, a population disproportionately affected by the epidemic. In August 2021, however, discord surfaced when the board announced that Raniyah Copeland would no longer serve as president and CEO. A month later, the board said that Toni Newman, a transgender leader, would step in as interim CEO. Kemal M. Atkins, EdD, was named managing director, and Pat Bass and Chris Bates were brought in as consultants.

"My goal," Newman tells POZ, "is to work with the BAI leadership team and Dr. Kemal Atkins to uplift, encourage and support the BAI staff through this transition. I have been working to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Black community for a long time, and BAI is at the core of that solution."

After Copeland's ouster, four HIV activists—all current or former board members—launched a Change.org petition urging the BAI board to resign and make way for a new one to govern. They also alleged that in January 2021 Copeland "brought charges of bullying, harassment and creating a hostile work environment" against her supervisor, BAI's board chair, but that a proper investigation wasn't initiated.

Then a group of HIV leaders published a sign-on letter urging that Copeland be reinstated and that those still on the board step down to be replaced by a more representative group.

BAI's founder and former president/CEO, Phill Wilson (who is profiled on page 48), posted an opinion piece via Facebook. "I have no confidence in the current board," he wrote, adding that the board has only one gay Black man and no one living with HIV; nor are there any transgender members or open lesbians or anyone from Los Angeles where the nonprofit is headquartered and offers direct HIV services. "The future of BAI, its work, and its dedicated staff are in danger, unless the community steps up now," Wilson wrote. "We cannot afford to lose another Black organization."

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