Sero Project Releases New Short Film on HIV Criminalization

November 30, 2016 By Sean Strub

In conjunction with World AIDS Day on December 1, the SERO Project announced the release of its new documentary short film, HIV Criminalization: Masking Fear and Discrimination. The short film furthers SERO Project's goal to raise awareness of the continued criminalization of people living with HIV.

"As HIV activists, HIV criminalization is a defining moral issue of our time," said SERO Project executive director Sean Strub. "State statutes throughout the country that prosecute people based solely on their viral status pose a serious threat to both public health and individual civil liberties. Masking Fear and Discrimination serves as a primer on the topic of HIV criminalization, particularly for those who are new to this growing concern.For advocates and health professionals in the field, it is essential viewing."

Masking Fear and Discrimination is directed by filmmaker Christopher King and produced by HIV writer Mark S. King. It was made possible through the support of the H. van Ameringen Foundation, Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, the Elton John AIDS Foundation, and the Gill Foundation.

The short film features Cecilia Chung, SERO's board chair and senior strategist at the Transgender Law Center (San Francisco, CA), Venita Ray, attorney and advocate at Legacy Community Health Services (Houston, TX), Anthony Mills, MD (Los Angeles, CA), and Justin Rush, director of public policy at the True Colors Fund and formerly a manager of policy and legislative affairs at the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (Washington, DC).

In addition, people living with HIV who have been prosecuted for "HIV crimes" are interviewed in the film, including Robert Suttle, SERO's assistant director (New York, NY), LTC Kenneth Pinkela, a consultant to Sero's Military HIV Policy Project (Otisville, NY), Monique Moree (South Carolina), Mark Hunter (Grambling, LA), Kerry Thomas (Boise, ID), Donald Bogardus (Waterloo, IA) and Edward Casto (Spokane, WA).

"I am inspired by the courage of those who have been prosecuted to step forward and become advocates for change," said Tami Haught, SERO's director of state organizing. "Their first-hand testimonials have brought this issue to the attention of advocates and the public and are why we have made progress towards ending HIV criminalization in recent years."

The release of the documentary coincides with the launch of a newly designed SERO Project website, which provides information on criminalization, including a helpful State-by-State guide and resources for people with HIV who are concerned about or threatened with prosecution. The site also features videos from the HIV Is Not a Crime national conference on HIV criminalization (produced by SERO and the Positive Women's Network-USA), interviews with people living with HIV who have faced criminal charges, and testimony concerning HIV criminalization at conferences and meetings.

HIV Criminalization: Masking Fear and Discrimination can be viewed on SERO Project site, at www.seroproject.com, or via YouTube at HIV Criminalization: Masking Fear and Discrimination.

SERO is a U.S.-based network of people living with HIV and allies fighting for freedom from stigma and injustice. SERO is particularly focused on ending inappropriate criminal prosecutions of people with HIV, including for non-disclosure of their HIV status, potential or perceived HIV exposure or HIV transmission.

For more information on the SERO Project please visit www.seroproject.com. For interviews with SERO staff, or a person living with HIV who has been subjected to HIV criminalization, please contact Ken Pinkela at ken.pinkela@seroproject.com.

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