

AIDS Legal Council of Chicago

PRESERVING, PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH HIV

Spring 2009

ALCC Caseloads Surging in Troubled Economy

With our country in the midst of a turbulent economic crisis, a growing number of people are finding themselves unemployed, uninsured, facing foreclosure or relying on food stamps and other public assistance programs to survive. For low-income people living with HIV, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet, the current climate has been especially bad news. That has meant a lot of new faces coming through the Council's doors.

Since the start of the Council's fiscal year in July 2008, ALCC staff has opened 944 new legal cases for nearly 640 HIV-impacted clients and their families - a sobering 11% increase in cases and a staggering 21% increase in clients compared to last year. Not surprisingly, requests for assistance with public benefits and employment-related matters have fueled much of this surge. Unfortunately, it is coming at a time when funding and donations have been in decline.

ALCC isn't the only agency that must reconcile this increase in demand with tightening budgets. All across the country, legal aid providers have been grappling with the same economic challenges, and making tough choices that range from cuts in service to hiring freezes and layoffs.

Thankfully, ALCC has not had to implement those kinds of cost-cutting measures because of the generous support of our friends and supporters. We remain committed to our mission of following the epidemic and delivering no-cost and immediate legal assistance to all those who call us for help. In fact, last summer ALCC began to conduct a survey of case managers and other service providers across Illinois to determine if there is a need for ALCC services in areas outside Cook County. Despite the economic outlook, we hope to unveil a plan for expansion later this year that would bring a broader range of HIV-specific legal services to those in other areas of the state.



"Our experienced and committed staff is determined, now more than ever, that we will be here to help our clients through the tough times ahead."

Ann Fisher, Executive Director.

A (Working) Roman Holiday

Bid bon voyage to Ann Fisher, our Executive Director, as she prepares to leave for Rome to participate in the International Expert Meeting on HIV Legal Services. The event, held May 3-6, is sponsored by the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and will focus on helping developing countries strengthen and expand legal services for people diagnosed with HIV. The American Bar Association selected Ann to attend the meeting, and has generously offered to sponsor her trip.

"I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to work with other advocates trying to provide legal services in developing countries," said Ann. "Plus, a trip to Rome in May sounds wonderful after a long Chicago winter."

Stay tuned to our blog (www.alcc-legalpad.blogspot.com) to learn more about Ann's conference.

ALCC Legal Hotline Update

As some of you will remember, ALCC launched a statewide toll-free hotline last February to help people diagnosed with HIV get answers to their questions about public benefits and health insurance programs. Targeted primarily to downstate residents with HIV, the hotline was a first step towards expanding services beyond Cook County.

Now, a year later, the hotline is having the impact we had hoped for. In the span of one year, our caseload numbers for non-Cook County residents has sky rocketed from 66 in 2007 to 133 at the end of 2008. The hotline, made possible by a grant from the Illinois Department of Public Health, is helping us to bring vital services to those who need them the most.

If you or someone you know could benefit from our hotline service, please call 1-866-506-3038.

Stimulus Package Provides Hope for ALCC Clients

In an economy that has continued to sour, the \$787 billion economic stimulus bill signed by President Obama on February 17 will provide some much-needed relief to the Council's clients. Here are the most directly applicable provisions:

Medicaid relief

\$87.1 billion has been allocated to aiding states with Medicaid programs. This means that there is new money coming into Illinois' Medicaid program, preventing state government from cutting services and ensuring that most providers will be paid within 30 days. The additional cash flow will help preserve vital health services for people with HIV.



Help with COBRA premiums

Present law allows employees who lose their jobs (and, consequently, their health insurance) to keep their group health benefits for up to 18 months, provided they pay 102% of the insurance premiums. Not surprisingly, many people who have just lost their jobs cannot afford the premiums.

Under the new bill, the federal government will pay 65% of health insurance premiums for the first nine months of unemployment for those who lost their jobs between September 1, 2008 and December 31, 2009. Individuals who did not apply for COBRA because they thought they would not be able to afford the premiums will be given an additional 60 day window to apply.

Other Benefits

- Unemployment compensation benefits will increase by \$25 per week.
- Most employed persons will receive an income tax rebate - typically \$400 for a single person or \$800 for a married couple.
- A one-time payment of \$250 will be made this spring to everyone receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits.

If you have any questions about how the new law may affect you, feel free to contact the Council at (312) 427-8990.

Kenneth Cole and ALCC: Fashion for a Cause

ALCC is excited to be teaming up with Kenneth Cole again this year for a shopping extravaganza you won't want to miss. All you Kenneth Cole fans out there, grab a friend and be sure to stop by the 540 N. Michigan Avenue store on Thursday, June 18 from 6-9 p.m. to enjoy music, food and 20% off your purchases. Twenty percent of your purchase will come back to ALCC to help support our services.

-KENNETH COLE PRODUCTIONS

Come Hang Out at our Legal Pad!



Ok, the Legal Pad is not actually a place, it's the Council's brand new blog where you can get the latest news about HIV, the law and the daily goings-on at our office. Find it on our Web site (www.aidslegal.com) or visit alcc-legalpad.blogspot.com to catch up on everything new at ALCC. Started by our very own Justin Hayford, the Legal Pad will host a variety of useful links to legal resources and HIV sites for people with HIV, as well as service providers and the general public.

Feel free to post comments, share your stories or suggest topics. We'd love to hear from you!

Pro Bono Roundup

As ALCC's caseload continues to increase we are especially thankful to our pro bono attorneys for dedicating their time and talent to our clients.

A special thanks to **Robert Brunner** for representing a young ALCC client who was turned away by the Job Corps after her instructors learned she was HIV-positive. Although she was in excellent health, her instructors claimed it would be better for her to be closer to her doctors in Chicago. She decided to fight back and came to us for help.

We'd also like to thank **Jonathan Wier**, of **Eimer Stahl Klevorn & Solberg**, and **Ryan Liebl** for their assistance with a case in which an HIV-positive widow of a minister was denied her husband's pension after his death in 2004. Mr. Liebl was able to navigate the case through numerous administrative obstacles and Mr. Weir is preparing litigation.

Finally, a big thank you to **Karin Prangley**, a bilingual attorney from **Krasnow, Saunders & Cornblath** who is providing estate planning help for some of our Spanish-speaking clients, and **James Thibodeau** and **Mark Hamill** from **Kirkland & Ellis**. James is assisting ALCC with a complex probate matter, and Mark is conducting research on legal issues that affect peer educators at HIV service organizations.

ALCC at Lobby Days

Four members of ALCC's staff, **Katie Condon**, **Steven Barrera**, **Lindsee Redmond** and **Anne Schmidlin**, travelled to Springfield to take part in Lobby Days, a two day event facilitated by the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. They spoke to representatives and senators about important bills currently under review that would further protect and provide adequate health care for people with HIV. Visit our blog (www.alcc-legalpad.blogspot.com) to learn more about the bills currently under consideration or go to AFC's website (aidschicago.org) to find out how you can advocate for their passage.



On the Frontlines

At the Council, every day is a battle to protect the rights of individuals diagnosed with HIV. When Doug (not his real name), came to see us, he had just learned that he had a Social Security overpayment of \$25,000 that he would need to pay back. In its infinite wisdom, however, Social Security decided to withhold his entire monthly check for two years to recoup the money, *leaving him with no income at all*.

Doug went to his local Social Security office to ask about another alternative, but was told that the best they could do was to give him an additional year to pay them back. Under the new arrangement, Doug would get \$318 a month.

"My rent is \$600 a month," he told the Social Security worker. "What am I supposed to do?"

The correct answer should have been: "Doug, we'll work out a payment plan that you can afford." After all, Social Security does not have a rule that it must collect overpayments in 36 months. But instead, Doug was handed a list of *homeless shelters*.

Doug immediately contacted ALCC and within an hour, he was meeting with paralegal Justin Hayford, who learned that Doug had also received a five-day notice from his landlord. Justin took Doug down to the Social Security office himself and, after a five minute conversation with a Social Security representative, arranged for Doug's check to be reduced by only \$100 a month, which Doug said he could afford.

Around the Council



Lindsee Redmond

ALCC is excited to welcome its newest paralegal, **Lindsee Redmond**. A native Chicagoan, Lindsee is a graduate of Pomona College in California where she gained experience as a college administrator and mentor for gay and lesbian youth. Lindsee is fluent in French and excited to be at ALCC helping clients with their day-to-day legal struggles.



Maria Duque

We also want to give an enthusiastic welcome to **Maria Duque**, our new bilingual administrative assistant who comes to us with many years of administrative experience at a local law firm. In addition to answering and directing calls, Maria assists our Office Manager with the Council's daily operations.

Anne Schmidlin is our new Community Outreach Coordinator - a role that allows her to put her public relations experience to good use. A native of Cincinnati and a graduate of the University of Dayton, Anne will be coordinating the Council's educational outreach efforts, assisting with a wide range of development responsibilities and expanding the Council's presence in the press and on the web.



Anne Schmidlin



Katie Pelach

A couple of second-year law students from Northwestern University are also new faces around the Council. **Katie Pelach** and **Alison Speck** started in January and are helping Council staff with Social Security and immigration cases.

Finally, some fresh new faces and fond farewells among our Board of Directors.

First let's welcome three wonderful new members: **Jody Adler, Esq.** of the Community Economic Development

Law Project, **Joshua**

Lee, Esq. of Schiff

Hardin LLP and

Tonya Wilkes Moore,

Esq. of McDermott

Will & Emery LLP.



Jody Adler, Esq.

We are excited to have you with us!

We also want to congratulate our newest board officers, including Board President

Bernard Cherkasov, Vice-President **Charlie Wintersteen** and Secretary **Chris Dickinson**. **Randall Ward** will continue on

as our Treasurer.

Lastly, a big thank

you and farewell to

George Gibson,

who retired from

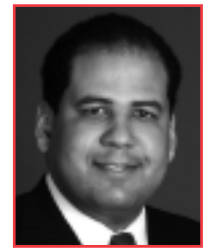
our board late last

year. We'll miss

you, George!



Tonya Moore, Esq.



Joshua Lee, Esq.

In Memoriam



Carey Nachtigall

We are saddened to announce the passing of our long-time paralegal and friend, **Carey Nachtigall**. Diagnosed with HIV in his 20s, Carey had been on disability for several years before coming to ALCC, first as a volunteer and then as a paralegal and client advocate. During his nine years with us,

we fondly remembered him as a gruff, sarcastic New Yorker (and devoted Yankees fan) with a seemingly limitless capacity for empathy. Carey was a fierce advocate, taking on many of ALCC's most challenging insurance and public benefits cases. His warm spirit and strong character will be deeply missed. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family, his partner Henry Chang and the many friends who are grieving this tragic loss.

Celebrate and Honor!

Mark your calendar for the Council's 15th Annual Advocates of the Year Awards where ALCC will acknowledge the exceptional work of local men and women who are making a difference in the lives of people with HIV. The event will be held on **Tuesday, May 5, 2009** at Playboy Enterprises in Chicago, and will pay tribute to the following outstanding advocates:

- **Swarup Mehta, Pharm D.** from Walgreen's Pharmacy at Northstar Medical Center,
- **Peter McLoyd** from the CORE Center,
- **Rev. Stan Sloan** from Chicago House,
- **Ann Dunmore** from the Ambulatory and Community Health Network of Cook County,
- **Linda Arnade** from Chicago Women's AIDS Project, and
- **Northwestern University Dance Marathon**

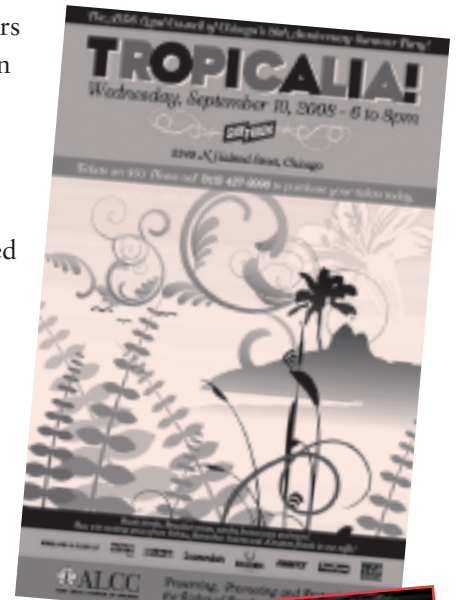
General admission is \$80 and all reservations will be held at the door. For more information, or to purchase tickets, please contact Ricardo Cifuentes or Anne Schmidlin at (312) 427-8990.



Our Name is Rio!

Many thanks to all the guests and sponsors who helped make our *Tropicalia!* event on September 10, 2008 such a wonderful success! More than 300 guests joined us at Sidetrack for an evening of samba, bossa nova and dancing, complete with a delicious array of Brazilian dishes prepared by **J&L Catering** and tasty *caipirinhas* served up by Sidetrack's bartending staff. Guests also had their pick of fantastic silent auction and raffle prizes, including a San Francisco weekend provided by **Orbitz** and **Kimpton Hotels**, and a private Lake Michigan cruise for 20 aboard the *Horseshoe Legend* - the **Horseshoe Casino's** luxurious yacht.

Special thanks go to **Edilson Lima** and his talented dancers for electrifying the crowd with their exuberant costumes and sexy samba moves, transforming Sidetrack into a carnival street scene in Rio.



Photos credited to J.O. Staff

The following sponsors also deserve a big thank you for having made our *Tropicalia!* event one of our most successful to date:

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Statement of Mission

The AIDS Legal Council of Chicago exists to preserve, promote and protect the legal rights of men, women and children in the metropolitan Chicago area living with HIV/AIDS. The Council provides direct legal services to people in need, educates the public about HIV-related legal issues and advocates for social policies that ensure fair treatment for all people with HIV/AIDS.

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ALCC



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