



hiv law project

Fighting since 1989 for the rights and dignity of people living with HIV/AIDS

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### Our History

HIV Law Project was founded in 1989 in response to a growing need for innovative legal services and advocacy programs for underserved, low-income people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly women and their families; people of color; undocumented and recent immigrants; members of the LGBT community; and the homeless.

In 1989, AIDS was primarily seen as a disease affecting upper-and middle-class white gay men. However, there was simultaneously a growing population of poor HIV-positive women and men of color, who desperately needed legal services, but who were confronted by a variety of financial, social, and legal barriers to getting the help they needed. To address this service gap, Terry McGovern, a young staff lawyer with legal services, began representing clients, one case at a time. As word spread through the community, Terry became inundated with requests for legal assistance in housing, family, and benefit cases. Unable to continue her work within the traditional legal services model, Terry set out to secure the funds to create a model project dedicated to helping low-income people living with HIV/AIDS. Within months, Terry raised enough money to launch HIV Law Project and hire additional staff to service the enormous demand.

HIV Law Project filed its first class action against the federal government in 1990, challenging the Social Security Administration's denial of disability benefits as discriminatory to women and people of color. Initially under the umbrella of MFY legal services, HIV Law Project became an independently chartered non-profit corporation in 1994.

**HIV Law Project** believes that all people deserve the same rights, including the right to live with dignity and respect, the right to be treated as equal members of society, and the right to have their basic human needs fulfilled.

These fundamental rights are elusive for many people living with HIV/AIDS. Through innovative legal services and advocacy programs, HIV Law Project fights for the rights of the most underserved people living with HIV/AIDS.

HIV Law Project was the first and, today, remains the only legal agency providing comprehensive services exclusively to low income people living with HIV/AIDS in New York City. Our mission conveys the values that drive our vision of community and service:

Today, we continue to fight for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS by providing free legal services and conducting advocacy programs in a comprehensive, interdisciplinary service delivery model that bridges service gaps and stabilizes some of New York City's poorest, most underserved, and vulnerable residents. HIV Law Project's long history of working with low-income HIV-positive communities and proven legal expertise make it uniquely qualified to provide crucial legal services and advocacy programs for this disenfranchised community. In turn, HIV Law Project has been successful in securing winning results and making a positive impact in the local communities where we work.