

**HEALTH CARE
WORKERS
INTERRUPTING
CRIMINALIZATION**

WHEN HEALING BECOMES RESISTANCE



INTERRUPTING HIV CRIMINALIZATION



I'M LASHANDA—AN ORGANIZER & ADVOCATE IN TENNESSEE. IN 2006, I MET A GENTLEMAN ON A CHAT LINE. WE WERE INTERESTED IN EACH OTHER.

🕒 21:59 ... I'M HIV POSITIVE.



WE DATED, AND LATER, I MOVED IN WITH HIM.



AFTER AWHILE, THE RELATIONSHIP WASN'T WORKING OUT, AND WE BOTH DECIDED TO SPLIT UP.



I THOUGHT EVERYTHING WAS OKAY UNTIL—

WE NEED TO SPEAK WITH LASHANDA SALINAS.



HOW MAY I HELP YOU?

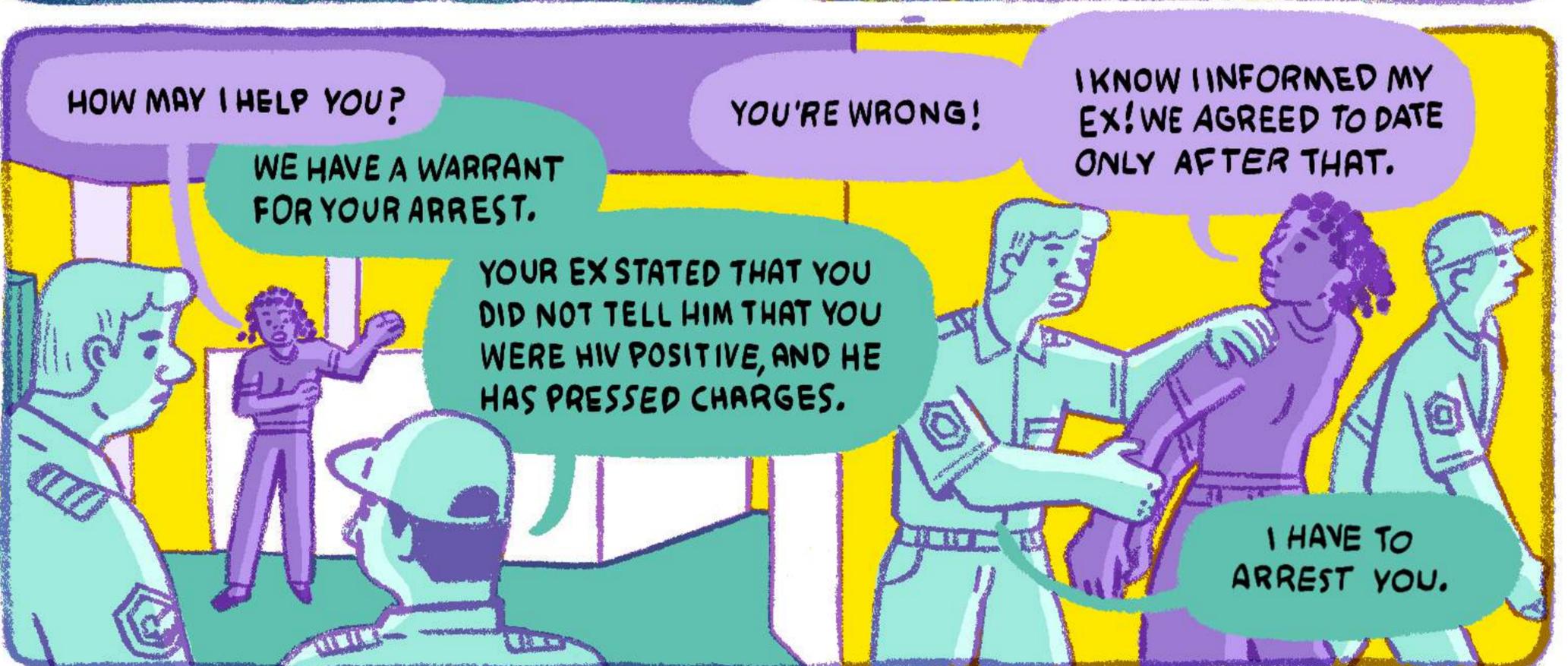
WE HAVE A WARRANT FOR YOUR ARREST.

YOU'RE WRONG!

I KNOW I INFORMED MY EX! WE AGREED TO DATE ONLY AFTER THAT.

YOUR EX STATED THAT YOU DID NOT TELL HIM THAT YOU WERE HIV POSITIVE, AND HE HAS PRESSED CHARGES.

I HAVE TO ARREST YOU.

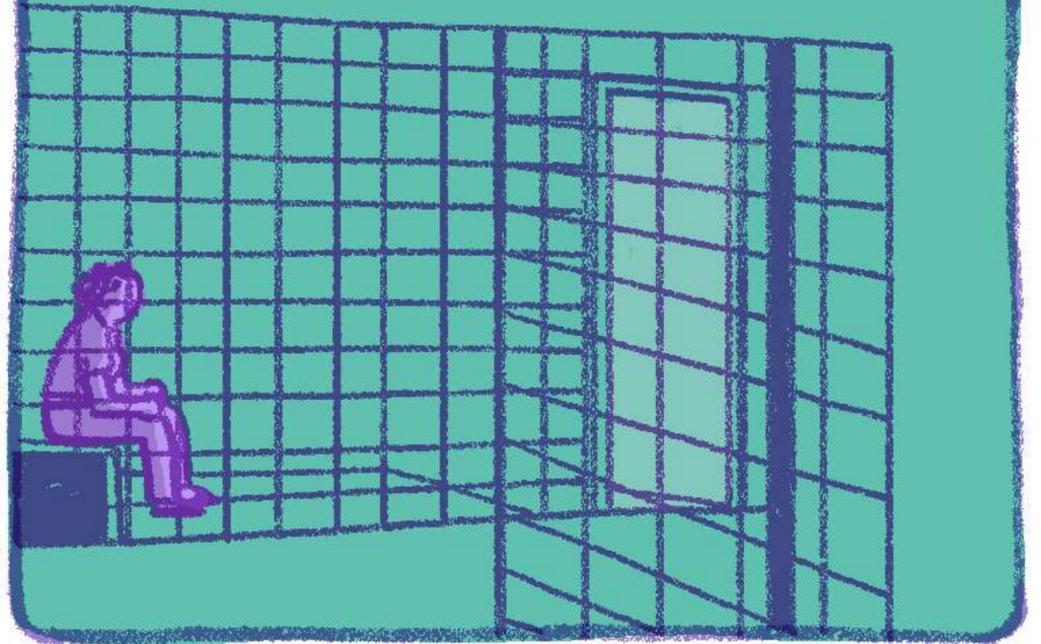


AT THAT MOMENT, IT STILL HAD NOT SET IN THAT I WAS ON MY WAY TO JAIL. I HAD SOME MONEY ON ME, SO I THOUGHT—

OKAY, I CAN BAIL MYSELF OUT.



I HAD NEVER BEEN IN ANY REAL TROUBLE BEFORE. I WAS PUT INTO WHAT THEY CALL A HOLDING CELL, WHICH LOOKED JUST LIKE A BIG DOG CAGE.



BEFORE I ARRIVED, I CALLED MY MOM TO LET HER KNOW WHAT HAPPENED.

BAIL IS SET AT \$100,000.



MY DYING FATHER, WHO HAD BRAIN CANCER, WAS IN THE HOSPITAL.

I WAS NOT ABOUT TO ASK HER TO PUT UP ANYTHING THEY HAD AS COLLATERAL. THAT IS WHEN IT HIT ME—

I'M IN JAIL.

I'M NOT GETTING OUT.



I WAS GIVEN A PUBLIC DEFENDER, WHO REQUESTED A HEARING TO TRY TO REDUCE MY BOND. THE DAY OF THE HEARING, I WAS SO NERVOUS, I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO PASS OUT.

DO YOU HAVE FAMILY IN TENNESSEE?

YES, I DO, IN NASHVILLE, KNOXVILLE, AND CHATTANOOGA.

YOUR BOND IS DENIED BECAUSE I BELIEVE YOU'RE A FLIGHT RISK.



WHEN I GOT BACK TO MY CELL, I CRIED MYSELF TO SLEEP, AT THAT TIME, I THOUGHT ABOUT KILLING MYSELF, I SENT A LETTER TO THE NURSE TO LET THEM KNOW HOW I WAS FEELING ...



...AND THE NEXT THING I KNEW, THE CORRECTIONS OFFICER TOOK ME TO ANOTHER ROOM AND PUT ME IN HANDCUFFS.

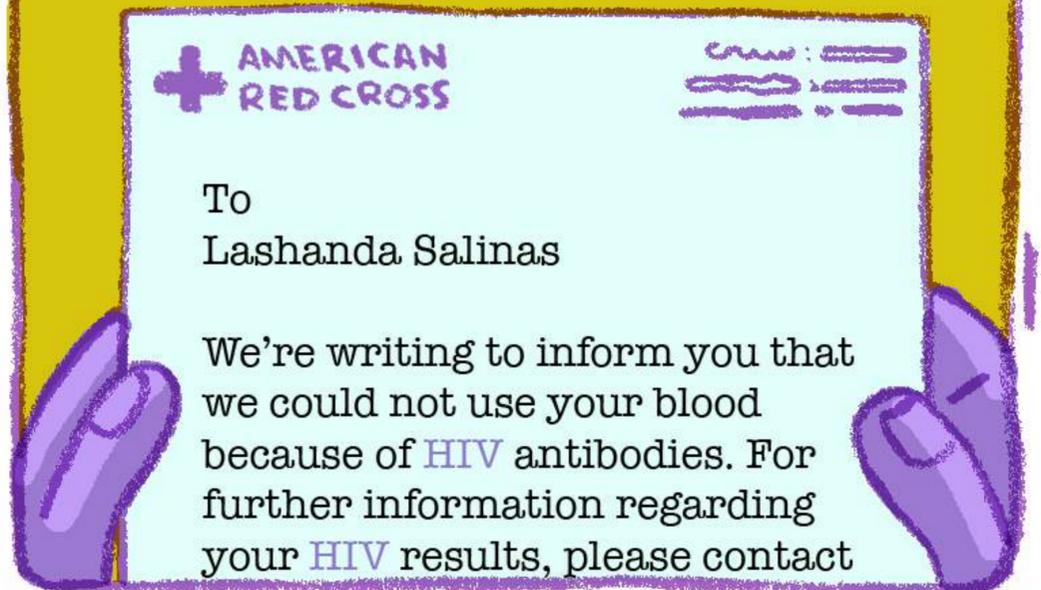


I THOUGHT BACK TO THE DAY I FOUND OUT ABOUT MY STATUS. I WAS 16 ...

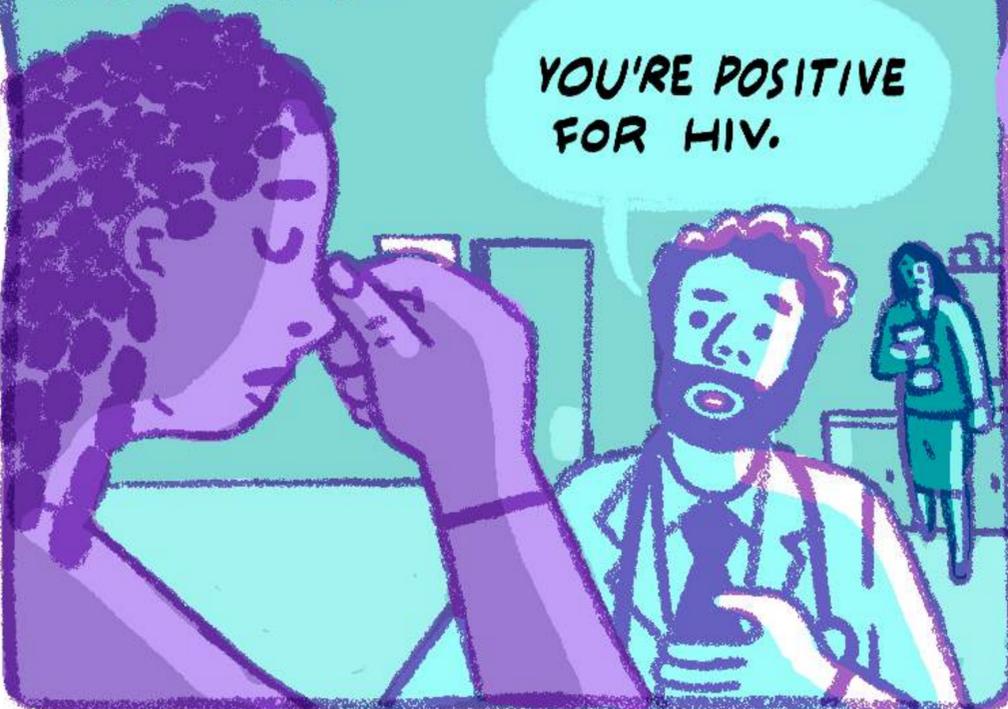


DID THEY WANT ME TO DONATE BLOOD AGAIN?

I FLIPPED THROUGH THE PAGES, AND ALL I SAW WAS HIV. MY HEART JUST WENT TO THE BOTTOM OF MY FEET.

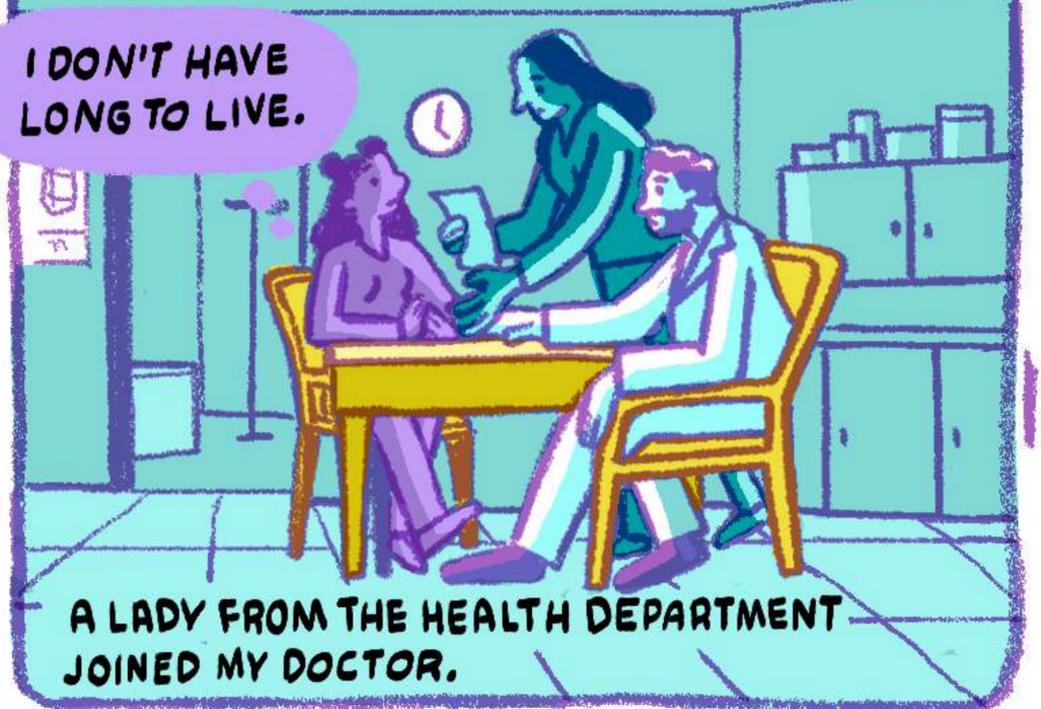


I WENT STRAIGHT TO MY FAMILY PHYSICIAN, WHO TESTED ME—



YOU'RE POSITIVE FOR HIV.

AT THE TIME, ALL I KNEW WAS THAT HIV WAS A DEATH SENTENCE.



I DON'T HAVE LONG TO LIVE.

A LADY FROM THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT JOINED MY DOCTOR.

SHE DIDN'T GIVE ME ANY HELPFUL INFORMATION.

HERE'S A PHONE NUMBER FOR THE CARE CENTER.

SET UP AN APPOINTMENT WITH AN HIV DOCTOR THERE.



SINCE I WAS UNDER 18, I WOULD HAVE TO TELL MY PARENTS.

HOW IN THE WORLD DO I SAY, "MOM, I'M HIV POSITIVE?"



THE FIRST THING MY MOM SAID TO ME WAS—

TOOTIE, I ALREADY KNOW YOU'RE PREGNANT.

MOM, I REALLY WISH I WAS. IT'S SOMETHING MORE DEVASTATING.



WHEN I TOLD HER, IT WAS LIKE THE WORDS KNOCKED THE WIND OUT OF HER, I'D NEVER SEEN MY MOM CRY LIKE THAT.

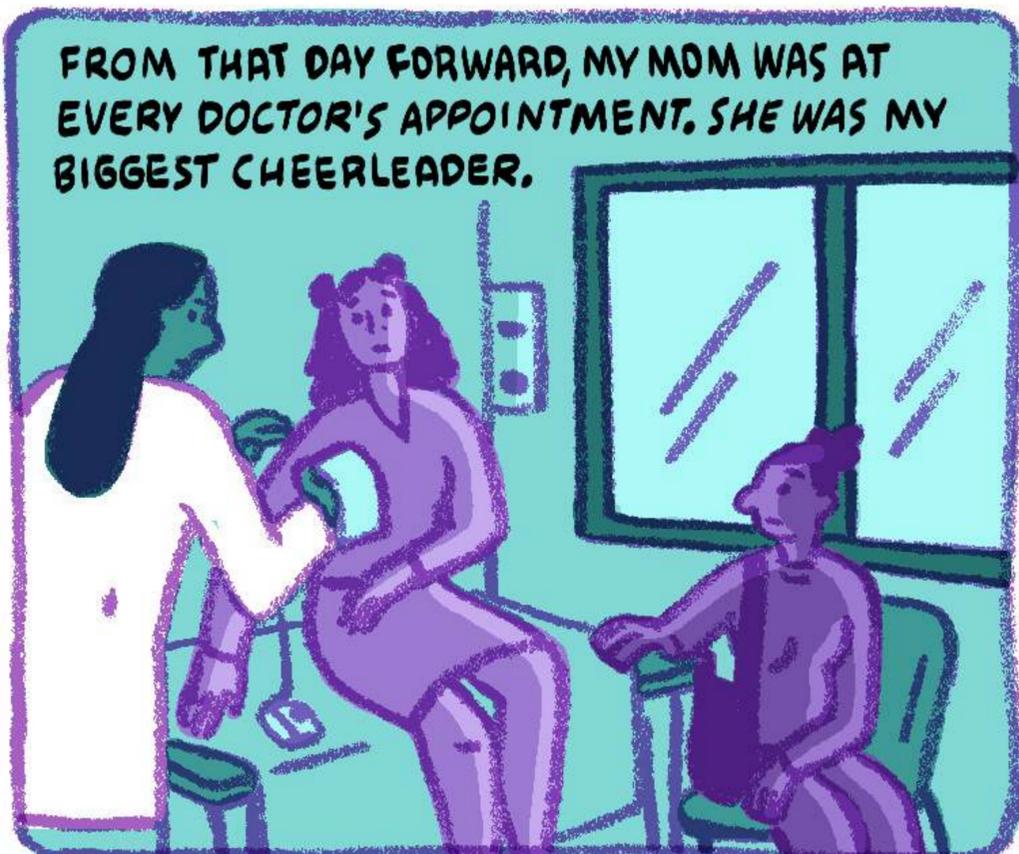


I THOUGHT I HAD LET HER DOWN. BUT—

TOOTIE, WE'RE GONNA GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER.



FROM THAT DAY FORWARD, MY MOM WAS AT EVERY DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT. SHE WAS MY BIGGEST CHEERLEADER.



AS A YOUNG PERSON, IT WAS SHOCKING TO LEARN ABOUT MY POSITIVE STATUS THROUGH A PUBLIC HEALTH NOTICE AFTER DONATING BLOOD. I REALIZED THAT THE GENTLEMAN I HAD BEEN WITH HADN'T DISCLOSED HIS STATUS TO ME.



I LEARNED LATER THAT NOT ONLY DID HE TRANSMIT TO ME, BUT HE ALSO TRANSMITTED TO TWO OF MY BEST FRIENDS.



NOW, YEARS LATER, IT WAS DEVASTATING TO BE ACCUSED OF THE EXACT HARM I HAD EXPERIENCED, ESPECIALLY WHEN I WAS SO CAREFUL TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING.



IN COURT, I WAS GIVEN TWO OPTIONS —

GO TO TRIAL AND POTENTIALLY SPEND 3 YEARS IN PRISON OR...

...PLEAD GUILTY AND SPEND 1.5 YEARS IN PRISON AND 1.5 YEARS ON PROBATION.



THE NEXT DAY, I GOT A VERY UPSETTING CALL THAT MY FATHER HAD DIED. I MET WITH MY CASE MANAGER TO FIND OUT HOW I COULD AT LEAST VIEW HIM.



YOU NEED A LETTER FROM THE FUNERAL HOME WITH INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR FATHER'S ARRANGEMENTS SO YOU CAN BE GRANTED A FURLOUGH.

ONE MORNING, I WAS HAVING BREAKFAST AND MY NAME WAS CALLED FOR COURT.





YOU'RE PROBABLY GOING TO GET YOUR FURLOUGH!



IT WAS TRUE, BUT MY PUBLIC DEFENDER ALSO HAD ANOTHER OFFER SHE THOUGHT I WOULD LIKE—

PLEAD GUILTY TO THE CHARGES AND BE SENTENCED TO 3 YEARS PROBATION.



IF I AGREED, I WOULD HAVE TO SAY I WAS GUILTY.

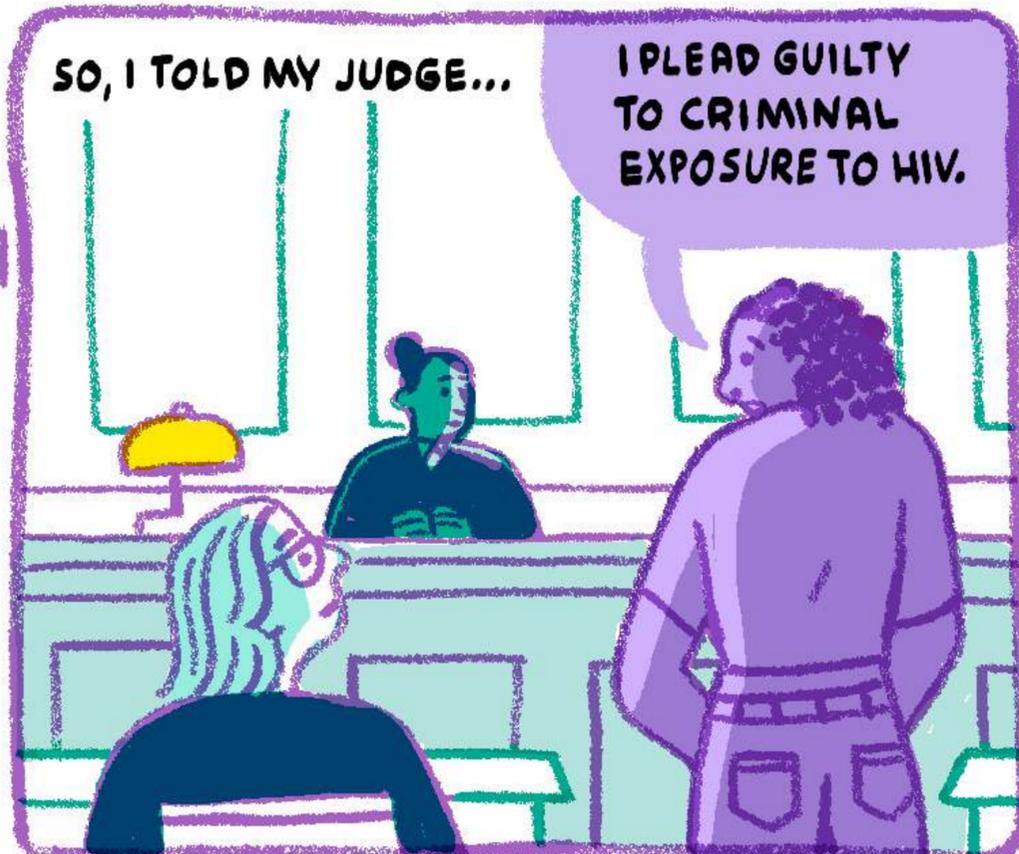
I DON'T WANT TO DO THAT.

I KNOW I TOLD MY EX THAT I WAS HIV POSITIVE.



BUT IF YOU TAKE THIS PLEA, YOU'D GET OUT IN TIME TO GO TO YOUR FATHER'S FUNERAL, AND YOU COULD HELP YOUR MOTHER.

MY MOTHER IS MY LIFE, AND SHE WAS GOING TO NEED ME.



SO, I TOLD MY JUDGE...

I PLEAD GUILTY TO CRIMINAL EXPOSURE TO HIV.



WHAT THE JUDGE AND PUBLIC DEFENDER DID NOT TELL ME WAS THAT THIS MEANT I WOULD BE REQUIRED TO REGISTER AS A SEX OFFENDER FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY	
NAME:	<input type="text"/>
AGE:	<input type="text"/>
ADDRESS:	<input type="text"/>

MY NAME IS JADA, AND I AM AN ATTORNEY WORKING ON HIV LAW AND POLICY. LASHANDA'S STORY CHANGED MY ADVOCACY AND HOW I APPROACH THIS WORK.

WHEN I THINK ABOUT TENNESSEE'S HIV LAW, I THINK ABOUT THE LIVES THAT HAVE BEEN TURNED UPSIDE DOWN.

IN TENNESSEE, IF YOU ARE LIVING WITH HIV AND YOU KNOW YOUR STATUS, YOU CAN BE CONVICTED OF A CHARGE CALLED CRIMINAL EXPOSURE TO HIV.

WHAT IT MEANS IS IF YOU HAVE ANY "INTIMATE CONTACT" WITH ANOTHER PERSON AND YOU DON'T DISCLOSE YOUR STATUS FIRST, YOU CAN BE CHARGED WITH A FELONY, EVEN IF HIV IS NOT TRANSMITTED, AND EVEN IF TRANSMISSION ISN'T POSSIBLE.

THESE CASES OFTEN COME DOWN TO ONE PERSON'S WORD AGAINST ANOTHER'S.

BEFORE 2023, UNDER TENNESSEE'S OLD LAW, CRIMINAL EXPOSURE TO HIV WAS CONSIDERED A "VIOLENT SEXUAL OFFENSE", WHICH MEANT REGISTERING AS A SEX OFFENDER FOR LIFE.

THIS IS NOT ONLY PUNISHING AND STIGMATIZING, BUT POTENTIALLY PUTS YOU AT RISK OF HARM.

IMAGINE: YOUR NAME, PICTURE, AND ADDRESS, ALL PUBLIC AND SEARCHABLE ONLINE. IT MEANS LIVING UNDER CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE AND RESTRICTION.



YOU CAN'T LIVE, WORK, OR TRAVEL FREELY WITHOUT CHECKING A LONG LIST OF RULES. ONE SLIP-UP AND YOU COULD FACE A CRIMINAL CHARGE.



IT'S A SYSTEM THAT ALSO ISOLATES. PEOPLE LOSE THEIR JOBS, THEIR HOMES, THEIR COMMUNITIES, AND ARE BARRED FROM LIVING WITHIN 1,000 FEET OF SCHOOLS AND PARKS.



MANY PEOPLE HAVE TO RELY ON UNDERGROUND ECONOMIES TO SURVIVE, PAYING FEES TO STAY ON A REGISTRY THEY SHOULDN'T BE ON IN THE FIRST PLACE.

IT'S A CYCLE THAT INCREASES THEIR LIKELIHOOD OF BEING ARRESTED AGAIN AND KEEPS PEOPLE TRAPPED IN FEAR AND POVERTY.



WHEN I WAS AT WORK ONE DAY, I GOT A CALL FROM MY PROBATION OFFICER —

YOU HAVE 24 HOURS TO GO TO COOKEVILLE, TENNESSEE, AND REGISTER AS A SEX OFFENDER.

BECAUSE YOU'RE CHARGED WITH CRIMINAL EXPOSURE TO HIV, YOU HAVE TO REGISTER AS A SEX OFFENDER.

YOU HAVE THE WRONG PERSON, I HAVE NEVER DONE ANYTHING TO A CHILD.

SO ARE YOU TELLING ME I CAN'T BE AROUND MY FAMILY BECAUSE THERE ARE KIDS?

YES.

I WAS IN COMPLETE SHOCK. FOR 17 YEARS, I HAD TO ABIDE BY THESE RULES.

I HAD ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR MY LITTLE COUSINS, AT HOLIDAY DINNERS, AT CHURCH.

WITH THE HELP OF MY PASTOR, I COULD ATTEND CHURCH UNDER HIS CARE.

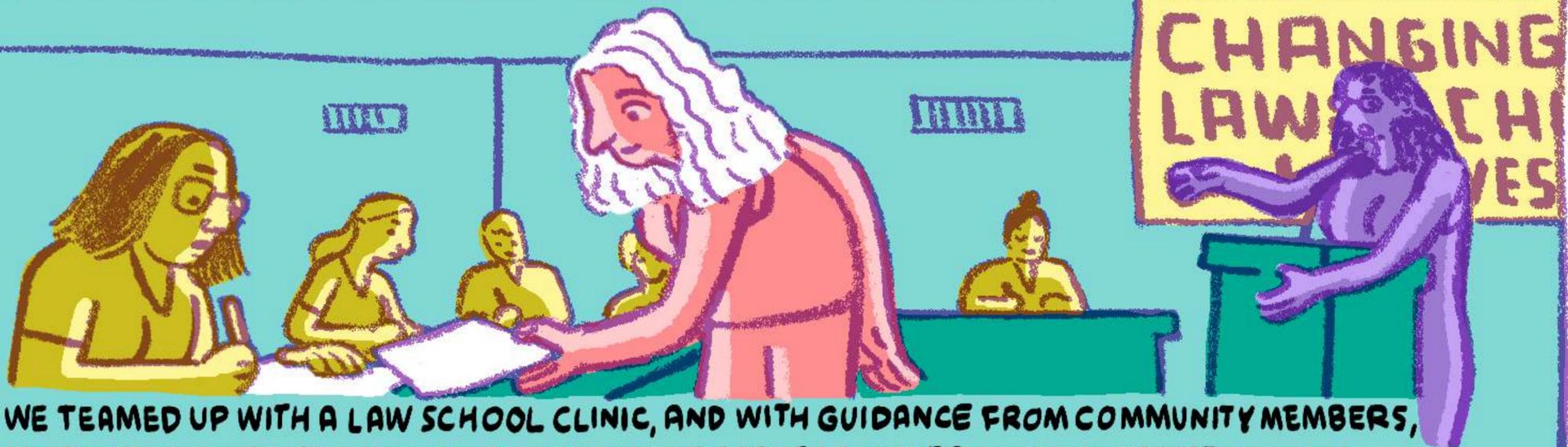
BUT I COULDN'T BE AROUND MY COUSINS OR FAMILY— NO CHRISTMAS, THANKSGIVING, EASTER, OR ANY OTHER HOLIDAYS.

DO YOU KNOW HOW HARD THAT IS?

LASHANDA AND I WORK TOGETHER AS PART OF THE TENNESSEE HIV MODERNIZATION COALITION TO END THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HIV. IN 2023, THE LAW CHANGED, OFFERING NEW HOPE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV, LIKE LASHANDA, WHO SPENT YEARS FORCED ONTO THE STATE'S SEX OFFENSE REGISTRY.

HIV IS NOT A CRIME

FOR THE FIRST TIME, SOME PEOPLE COULD FINALLY COME OFF IT. BUT WE LEARNED THAT THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION WASN'T PLANNING ON NOTIFYING ANYONE.



WE TEAMED UP WITH A LAW SCHOOL CLINIC, AND WITH GUIDANCE FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS, WE SENT OUT A SIMPLE LETTER TO NEARLY 80 PEOPLE WHO WERE ON THE REGISTRY ONLY BECAUSE OF AN HIV-RELATED CONVICTION.

OUR LETTER EXPLAINED THE CHANGE IN THE LAW, LAID OUT THE STEPS THEY COULD TAKE, AND INCLUDED A TEMPLATE LETTER THEY COULD USE TO CONTACT THE BUREAU DIRECTLY TO REQUEST REMOVAL. CHANGING A LAW DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY CHANGE A LIFE. PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT AND BE SUPPORTED, WE WORK CLOSELY WITH HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS WHO ARE OFTEN THE FIRST PEOPLE PATIENTS TURN TO FOR GUIDANCE.



THEY CAN ALSO HELP SUPPORT LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS TO REPEAL UNJUST LAWS THAT IMPACT PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV. TODAY, THERE ARE 60 FEWER PEOPLE ON TENNESSEE'S REGISTRY. OUR PEOPLE REFUSE TO LET UNJUST LAWS DEFINE WHO THEY ARE, AND WE'LL KEEP FIGHTING EVERY DAY TO CHANGE THEM.

LASHANDA: ON JULY 7TH, 2023, I FILED MY REQUEST AND WAS SUCCESSFULLY REMOVED FROM THE REGISTRY. MY LIFE DID A 360.

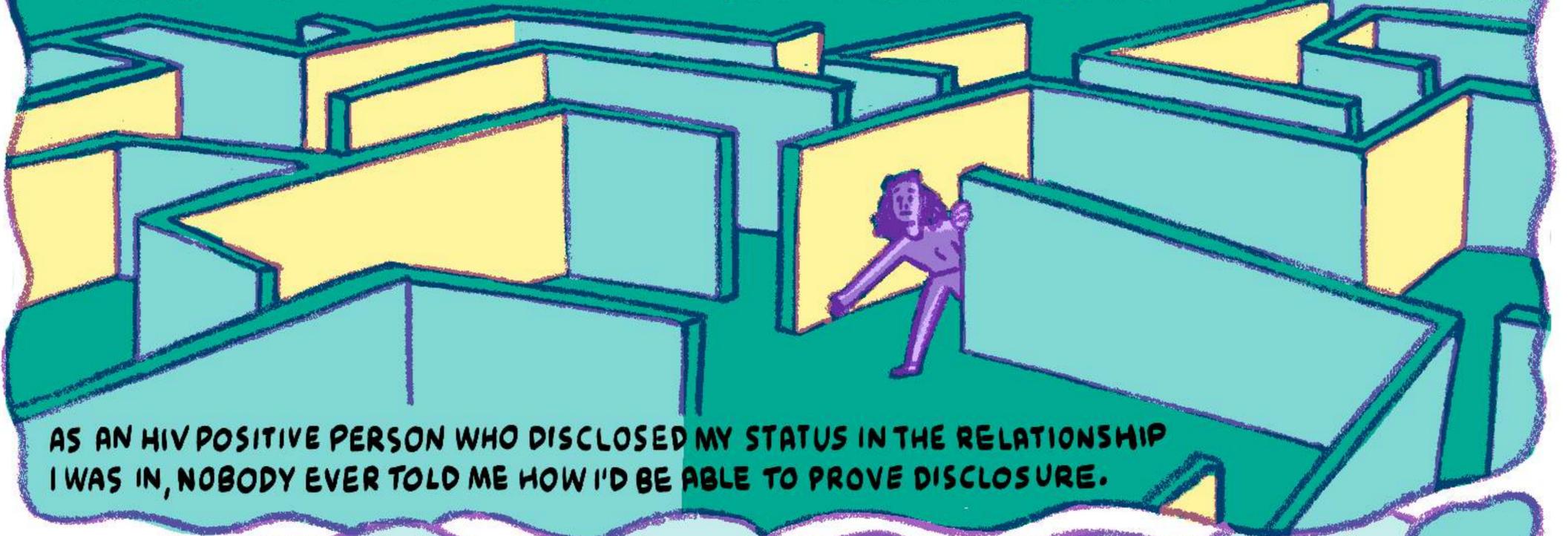


FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 17 YEARS, I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO SEE ALL OF MY FAMILY.



WHEN I LOOK BACK ON THAT TIME, I WISH SOMEBODY—

—A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER, A PUBLIC HEALTH WORKER, A COUNSELOR—WOULD HAVE TOLD ME HOW TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM SOMEONE BRINGING A CRIMINAL CHARGE AGAINST ME.



AS AN HIV POSITIVE PERSON WHO DISCLOSED MY STATUS IN THE RELATIONSHIP I WAS IN, NOBODY EVER TOLD ME HOW I'D BE ABLE TO PROVE DISCLOSURE.

ALL OF MY HIV DOCTORS HAVE BEEN A BLESSING IN MY LIFE, BUT I WISH SOMEONE HAD SAID TO ME —

BE CAREFUL, THERE IS A LAW OUT THERE.

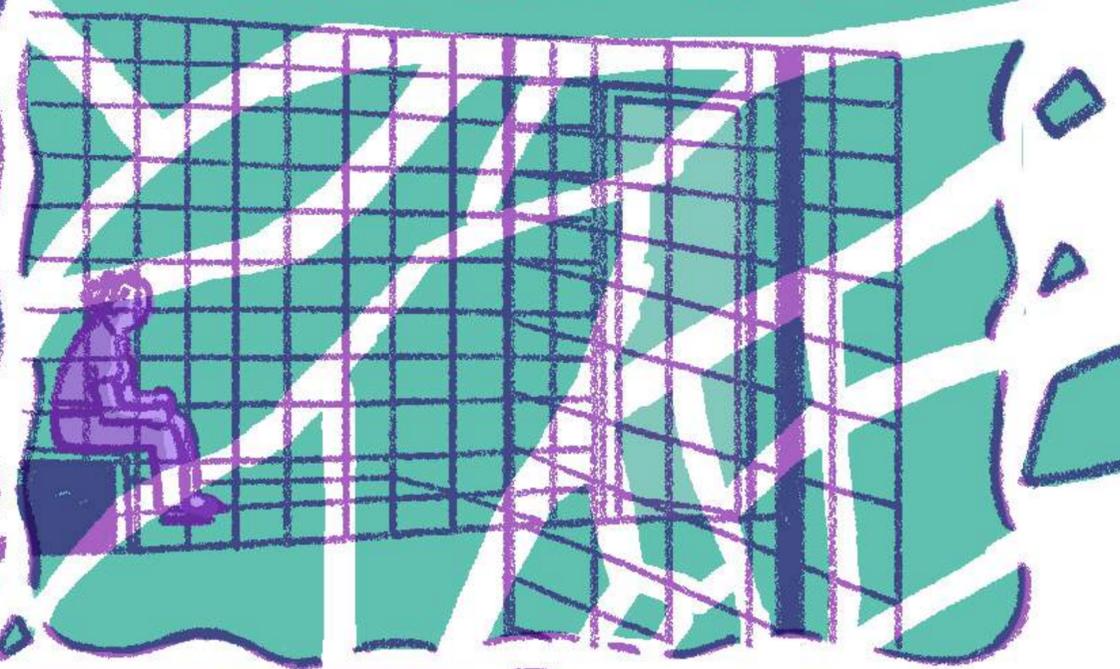
BRING YOUR NEW PARTNER TO A DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT SO THEY UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING CLEARLY...



...AND GET SOME DOCUMENTATION FROM THE DOCTOR TO KEEP YOURSELF PROTECTED BEFORE YOU ARE INTIMATE WITH SOMEONE.



IF I HAD BEEN TOLD WHAT TO DO TO PROTECT MYSELF WHEN I WAS FIRST DIAGNOSED, I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE BEEN IN THIS SITUATION.



THERE'S BEEN SOME PROGRESS TO REMOVE SOME OF US FROM THE REGISTRY, BUT THERE'S STILL WORK TO DO. THAT'S WHY WE CONTINUE TO FIGHT TO REPEAL THESE UNJUST LAWS IN TENNESSEE AND WORLDWIDE.





The *Beyond Do No Harm* Network is a group of Turtle Island-based health care providers, public health workers, impacted community members, advocates, and organizers working across racial, gender, reproductive, migrant and disability justice, drug policy, sex worker, and anti-HIV criminalization movements to address the harm caused when health providers and institutions and public health researchers and institutions facilitate, participate in and support criminalization.

This comic was illustrated by [Kruttika Susarla](#).



**IC INTERRUPTING
CRIMINALIZATION**