

HIV/AIDS Council in Broward Accused of Racism

Council Restores Funding to Complementary Therapies in Final Minutes of the Meeting

By Michael James

The Broward County HIV Health Services Planning Council, in a report from the Joint Priorities Committee approved by the full council at their monthly meeting held on February 26, has adopted what some consider exclusionary language.

Greg Scott, the president of the People With AIDS Coalition of Broward County (PWAC), attended the council meeting, hoping the council might address the matter. Scott stated that instead of hearing the concerns of the PWAC, the council used "procedural maneuvers and unprofessional ad hominem tactics to prevent any discussion of these important issues, and repeatedly refused to read into the record a letter from

the PWAC outlining its concerns and corresponding recommendations."

Scott says that the council is suggesting gay white men are not deserving of ambulatory outpatient medical care in a ratio "consistent to the demographics of the epidemic."

The language he speaks of appears in at least two tables distributed with the report of the Joint Priority Committee, and may appear elsewhere the council chooses to define Priority One. The council offered no epidemiological, needs assessment, or economic data to justify the language.

The county attorney advised the chair of the council to read a letter prepared by Scott into the meeting minutes after Scott

left the meeting.

"The process of setting priorities and allocating funds for each service category is always very difficult and sometimes controversial," says Scott. "That's one of the reasons many metropolitan areas with successful HIV health services planning councils hold public hearings at this stage in the process—to ensure the community has every opportunity for input before the allocations are finalized."

Council Member Bill Marx, chair of the Joint Client Community Relations Committee has requested copies of the audio record of the meeting. He said, "Some committee members repeatedly used the term 'gay white men' while discussing funding for complementary therapies—almost snickering—as if we should be ashamed of that and I'm not ashamed."

Marx and Scott suggested that some council members who attended the final meeting made "racist comments" concerning a 20% reduction in complementary therapies, as most clients accessing such services are gay white men.

The PWAC believes the utilization data could reflect the demographics of long-term

survival, as years of anti-retroviral drugs can cause a painful, usually progressive, and sometimes crippling condition for which complementary therapies like massage are often prescribed.

The council voted to restore level funding to complementary therapies in the final minutes of the meeting. However, Scott says the council refused to address PWAC's other concerns, which included the failure of administrators to exercise spending discretion in a year of budget shortfalls as well as the exclusionary language used to define Priority One.

Marx says, "I'm proud to be a gay white man and I'm proud of the way gay white men have contributed to the welfare of people with AIDS, by fighting for these funds through the late 1980's, and defending them through the 1990's. Now, in our third decade of an epidemic, does the planning council really mean to alienate an entire community so central to the war against AIDS?"

PWAC says they will address the final concerns with the Broward County Commission, the elected body that appoints the planning council and oversees its activities.



Greg Scott

Forum on Florida's Law Banning Gay Adoption at GLCC

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of South Florida (GLCCSF) will host an event highlighting Florida's ban on gay adoptions on Thursday, March 14.

Beginning at 7:30, televisions will be set up for a viewing party of ABC's Primetime Live with Diane Sawyer.

During the broadcast, plaintiffs in the pending ACLU challenge to the Florida statute banning gay adoption will join comedian Rosie O'Donnell to discuss and draw attention to the ban.

The ACLU of Florida and the National ACLU's Lesbian & Gay Rights Project initially filed suit to challenge the statute in

1998. Florida is currently the only state with a comprehensive statute banning gay adoption.

Following the airing, there will be a forum featuring Matt Coles, the Executive Director of the national ACLU's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project, as well as representatives of the ACLU and the GLCC. They will talk about the lawsuit and the other work of the project, and the public will have the opportunity to ask questions and offer input.

The GLCC is located at 1717 North Andrews Avenue, in Fort Lauderdale.

For more information, contact the GLCC at 954.463.9005.

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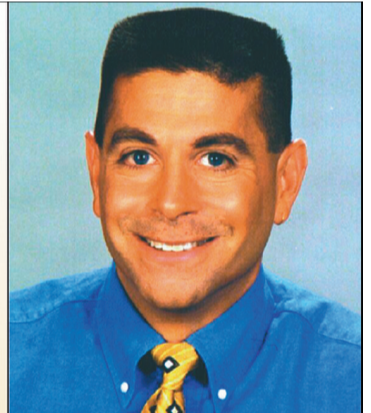
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