

TESTIMONY OF DAVID W. HOUSEKNECHT, P.W.A.  
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HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
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During 1984 I was a therapist in a Catholic community based hospital and mental health facility. My lover was diagnosed with AIDS. We had lived our whole lives there. I had been employed for 14 years as a professional therapist. My lover died of AIDS in the hospital where I worked. I lost my job, home and was forced to move from the rural community which had always been our family's home.

I moved to the Pocono area to start over. I was employed in a community residential facility (group home). I found an apartment on a restored farm. During the next 2 years I started putting my life back together. I was promoted to supervisor.

During the summer of 1987 I experienced an attack of Bronchitis. My physician required that I rest for 2 weeks. I requested HIV testing. The doctor, on vacation, called to return the results. "Dave, you have AIDS.". He called again in 15 minutes, "Don't do anything crazy.". He referred me to an infectious disease specialist who told me to write my will. When my doctor returned from his vacation he provided a written statement saying that I was free of contagious disease and said I could return to work. It was at this time I found out that I was HIV positive, and did not have AIDS.

I returned to work. I worked a full day. My supervisor asked me to talk with her in the office. She explained that she believed that I had AIDS. She also stated that all employees were being required to be tested for HIV. She then stated that I would be unable to return to work without releasing this information to the company. I stated that I felt this was private and confidential information that had no bearing on my job or duties.

The following day my supervisor called and again explained the need for me to comply with their request for information. She stated that she would send me a form. I called an attorney and requested advice. During the weeks and months to follow I was not allowed to return to work, my salary was stopped, my benefits were reduced, and fellow workers were told that I had AIDS. The attorneys involved settled out of court and attempted to restore what had been lost during the 6 months I was prevented from working. The people I supervised still believed that I had AIDS and were afraid of working with me. I had lost my apartment 2 miles from where I was employed and was forced to live with a friend, who provided food and my basic needs during this time. I had to commute 96 miles a day to work after being reinstated. The physician refused to see me in his office. He was afraid I would affect his business.

Co-workers placed posters over my desk with large lettering announcing the AIDS hotline phone number. Each employee spoke with me expressing their concern and anger at the risk of working with me. They were concerned about allowing me to have contact with the residents of the program.

In-service education programs were to be provided prior to my return, in order to familiarize the staff with HIV and assist them in understanding about V and AIDS in the workplace. This was not done. I attempted to schedule this educational training and my supervisor canceled it. She stated that there were not enough employees available to attend.

Several months passed and I continued to work and the staff expressed their concerns and I attempted to educate as they would allow but no formal education was provided.

My supervisor told me of an opportunity to develop programming to establish the rights for equal treatment of the dually diagnosed in Pennsylvania. She expressed her belief that I would be able to develop this program to benefit this group of disabled people.

I followed up these ideas and contacted representatives for the department of Mental Retardation. My current supervisor also told two co-workers about this opportunity. They also pursued the same contacts. After many interviews I was selected and contracted with to provide services to a dually diagnosed individual.

I provided the services appropriate to the needs of the individual in compliance with the contract provided.

The client was hospitalized for medication changes. The attending psychiatrist, the office of the department of mental retardation, the family of the client, and the county administering the contract were in agreement that the best discharge plan was to my care.

The program and care plan were progressing well as was documented in the client's records. The client was to be discharged to my care at the end of the week.

I was working with the client in his work place located in the institution where he had previously resided. I was requested to meet with a representative of the department of retardation and the county administrator of the MH/MR program supervising my contract. I was asked if I had AIDS. I explained that I was certainly willing to discuss the progress of the client, but not my personal information. They explained they needed to know. I asked why? They explained that the client might bite me or somehow become exposed or infected with AIDS and they had to be able to represent his needs. I explained that I felt that the information that they were requesting had no bearing on the quality of care or my ability to administer care to the client. They asked, "Do you have AIDS, we need to know?" I told them that this was not something that I was able to discuss any further and that my attorney needed to be included in any and all conversations regarding this subject.

On the morning of the client's discharge I went to the state hospital to pick him up. During the clients discharge I was told that an attorney for the department of welfare had stopped the discharge and that the county had withdrawn my contract.

For the third time I lost my job, home, and another relationship that had become important in my life. I was forced to take shelter in an abandoned house located in a used car lot.

I had no medical benefits, or resources. A previous co-worker who had taken my job called and encouraged me to return to work at the group home. Due to my lack of alternatives I returned and commuted approximately 136 miles a day for approximately \$5.35 an hour and no benefits. I worked my scheduled 40 hours and always accepted 10 to 20 hours overtime to attempt to pay bills left by my former living arrangements and the cost of health benefits.

In February of 1988 I was hired as a consultant to the AIDS Services Center of the Lehigh Valley. I resigned from the group home.

On May 16, 1989 I had a stroke at work losing partial vision and the ability to direct my speech. I was conducting a training session at the time. I finished my work and was taken to the hospital, where I was seen in the emergency room by my physician. I was put on medication and I returned to work the following day.

On June 1, 1989 I was diagnosed with pneumocystis pneumonia and hospitalized for 72 hours. I insisted on a semi-private room. When the wife of my roommate heard the word AIDS she had her husband moved. The following room-mate was an emergency appendectomy. The nurses changed his bed, provided his food in bed, and assisted his personal needs. The sheets and towels for my side were left on a chair by the door. My food was left by the door. I was not told about medications by nursing staff that my doctor had made available to me. I was not given assistance with bathing or personal needs. I requested to be discharged. I felt safer at home.