

## Ryan White's Mom Calls on Legislators to Reform Indiana's HIV Criminal Laws



*Photo Courtesy of HMM-Indiana*

After decades of breakthroughs in HIV science and medicine, we now have the tools to end the HIV epidemic, but outdated and stigmatizing HIV criminal laws are holding us back.

My name is Jeanne White-Ginder. I'm the mother of Ryan White, who was born with hemophilia and one of the first children in the U.S. to be diagnosed with AIDS in 1984.

When we lived in Kokomo, Indiana, doctors gave my son six months to live. Remarkably, Ryan survived another 5 years and during that time became nationally recognized for his efforts to end HIV stigma and discrimination. I have worked to continue my son's legacy of advocacy, sharing his story to this day.

I was surprised to recently learn that a number of states—including Indiana, where Ryan worked so hard to fight HIV stigma and discrimination—still have [laws that criminalize people living with HIV](#) based on their health status.

Indiana's oldest HIV criminal laws were enacted in the 1980s, when Ryan was still alive. They were enacted during a time when there was no education on AIDS and many people thought you must have done something bad or wrong to get the disease. Back then, there was a lack of information that created a culture of fear around the virus and people were afraid that kissing, tears, sweat, and saliva spread HIV, none of which is true. I would try to explain to people, "Well, he got it from his Factor VIII (a medicine made from donated plasma) used to treat his hemophilia" and they would ask disbelievingly, "He got it how?"

Ryan and our family faced a lot of discrimination back then when he was diagnosed. Ryan just wanted to be treated like everybody else and go to school like other kids his age. But the school system did everything they could to keep him out of the classroom. They discriminated against him because of his health condition.

Ryan left us more than 30 years ago, and even though the scientific understanding and medical treatment has advanced by leaps and bounds since then, the stigma around HIV still exists. Indiana's decades old HIV criminal laws are now scientifically outdated and only make that



*Photo Courtesy of Jeanne White-Ginder, with her son Ryan White*

stigma worse. It pains me to know if my son was still alive, he would be exposed to criminal liability under these laws.

Today, people living with HIV in Indiana can be criminalized in a number of ways because of their HIV status, including for blood donation while knowingly HIV positive. Indiana's blood donation law was enacted over three decades ago to help protect people from acquiring HIV from the blood supply, like Ryan did. Universal screening practices implemented since then are what keeps the blood and plasma supply safe for recipients — any donations that test positive for HIV are discarded. As a result, Indiana's criminal donation law doesn't add protection, it only adds to HIV stigma.

We now know that the blood and plasma supply are safe from HIV, people living with HIV can live long healthy lives, and there are multiple effective ways to prevent HIV transmission. Because of these remarkable advances there are widespread efforts across the U.S. to end the HIV epidemic, including Indiana's own plan, [Zero is Possible: Indiana's Plan to End HIV and Hepatitis C \(2021-2030\)](#)

Retaining outdated HIV criminal laws, while simultaneously promoting strategies to prevent HIV and treat it like other manageable conditions, harms efforts to end the epidemic. Recently, the CDC's *Ending the HIV Epidemic* plan called for states to [update outdated laws](#) to reflect astounding biomedical advances in HIV care and prevention. There is now plenty of evidence demonstrating how HIV criminal laws increase stigma. Stigma is one of the biggest barriers to ending the HIV epidemic as it can deter people from getting tested and engaging in care. Indiana's HIV criminal laws do not reflect the remarkable advances in HIV treatment and prevention that have taken place since my son Ryan was alive.

It is now time to modernize Indiana's HIV laws and improve access to testing, treatment, and prevention resources. We owe it to my son Ryan—an Indiana boy once shunned by society for his health condition but who left a legacy of compassion and education—to make sure that fear, stigma, and scientific misinformation and discrimination are eliminated from Indiana laws. We hope you will join us by contacting your elected officials and asking them to help reform Indiana's HIV criminal laws.

[Jeanne White-Ginder](#)

Mother of Ryan White (1971-1990)

Indiana teen who fought against HIV stigma.

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[Click here](#) to learn more about Ryan White

[Click here](#) to learn more about Indiana's HIV Criminal Law Reform Efforts.