

Community engagement and the need to share information related to SB275

In the first meetings of this Advisory Task Force in 2022, members identified community engagement as a top priority. We felt that the Task Force needed to 1) inform the community about the major changes that SB275 enacted, and 2) reach out to communities that were impacted by SB275 and/or address any concerns that communities had with the bill.

Members of the Task Force realized that many Nevadans were not aware of the important changes that SB275 made to our state's criminal and public health laws, especially the communities that are most affected. We wanted to ensure that, first, people living with HIV knew how the changes in the bill protect them from unfair criminalization based on their HIV status. We also identified several other communities that need to be informed of these changes to state law, including but not limited to, law enforcement, first responders and other public employees, lawyers and criminal justice experts, sex workers, Department of Corrections staff, and sexual assault advocacy groups.

Considering the structure of the Task Force, we found that it may be difficult for the Task Force to host or partner on educational events to help spread the word. One approach we decided we could take instead was to develop a fact sheet that could be disseminated to the public. Although other community groups have already begun to share information, such as the Nevada HIV Modernization Coalition and Silver State Equality, we felt that the community would greatly benefit from additional information sharing. We contacted Nevada Legal Services knowing that they've created helpful fact sheets for other legislation and state laws in the past. Luckily, Nevada Legal Services had the capacity to develop a fact sheet for SB275 thanks to a grant they had received. A representative from Nevada Legal Services attended our meeting in June to learn about the information that we want to share. Nevada Legal Services then produced flyers targeting the general public, law enforcement, and medical providers. The Task Force and Nevada Legal Services worked together for several months to review drafts and recommend revisions. Final versions of the flyers are being completed and will soon be ready to share with the public.

The Task Force also thought of a few other strategies to reach certain communities. We felt that many police officers, prosecutors, and defense lawyers may not be aware of how SB275 impacts their work, especially in terms of arrests and prosecutions of people living with HIV and sex workers. To reach people in these professions, we realized that we could publish informational pieces in specific publications, such as statewide law journals, the Vegas Beat Magazine, or even national publications for law enforcement and lawyers.

In addition to informing the community about the bill, there are certain communities we wanted to engage with to ensure that they were content with certain provisions of the bill that affected their specific community. Outreach to the sex work community was a huge priority considering the repeal of NRS 201.356 and NRS 201.358. To reach this community, we contacted organizations such as the Nevada Brothel Association, the Cupcake Girls, and the Sex Workers

Alliance of Nevada. Task Force members informed representatives from these organizations about SB275, asked for their opinions about these legal changes, and invited members of their organizations to attend a meeting to speak during public comment. We also extended an invitation for members of these organizations to join the Task Force if they were interested. We did not hear any opposition to the bill from any of these groups.

Members of the Task Force also learned that one of SB275's changes may have had an unintended, negative consequence. With the repeal of NRS 441A.320, health departments no longer had the authority to test an alleged perpetrator of a sex related crime. This change was concerning to health departments, law enforcement, and advocates of sexual assault victims. Consequently, the Task Force prioritized this issue and contacted the concerned parties in hopes of hearing their point of view and possibly learning of solutions. We reached out to contacts at the Washoe County and Southern Nevada Health Districts, the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on the Rights of Survivors of Sexual Assault, the Center Advocacy Center at The Center in Las Vegas, the Washoe County Sheriff's Office, the Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence, and Signs of Hope (a sexual assault resource organization in Las Vegas). More information about this issue and our outreach can be found in the "NRS 441A.320" and "Public Health Authority" sections of this report.

SB275 made many changes to public health law, including changes to health departments' authority to investigate and control the spread of disease. Both the Southern Nevada Health District and the Washoe County Health Department were very involved in discussions regarding these statutes leading up to the passage of the bill. Consequently, members of this current Task Force felt that it was important to include the health districts' perspectives in this report, which can be found in the section titled "Public Health Authority."

We also prioritized outreach to representatives of first responders, including the union that represents Nevada firefighters. The Task Force felt it was important to connect with them because of their opposition to the 2019 Task Force's recommendations regarding NRS. 441A.195. More information about this is in the "1st responders" section of the report.

Ultimately, the Task Force believes that additional outreach and education is extremely necessary to ensure that Nevadans are well aware of the changes made by SB275. Community advocates and organizations will play a major role in this education once the Task Force adjourns, and many members of the Task Force are committed to working with these individuals and groups to continue informing the public. We have also tried our best to engage all interested parties and solicit their opinions to ensure that any inadequacies of SB275 can be addressed during the 2023 Nevada Legislative Session. Going forward, the Task Force hopes to see continued collaboration around all of these issues.