

May 20, 2020 Press Release

The AIDS crisis in the 1980s called upon the strength of the LGBTQIA community and its allies to address a global public health issue. How many lost friends, relatives, and lovers to what was once a devastating fatal illness?

Thanks to the tireless advocacy of the gay community and its allies, this once “unprecedented tragedy,” arguably the most devastating of all infectious diseases that humanity had ever faced, is now treated and treatable as a chronic medical condition.

The HIV response changed the face of public health in profound ways. Treatments have been found. High-impact services can be delivered in resource-constrained settings. Attitudes can change. Communities can be mobilized to take action. People diagnosed with HIV can now be provided with health insurance thanks to the Obama administration. With sufficient will, commitment and resources, a bleak and depressing situation can be turned into one that offers hope.

At CLASS, where I have served first as Executive Director for the past 20 years, our organization embraces and advocates for all humans. I long for the day when we are all treated equally, but I know that LGBTQIA people and in particular our transgender community and people of color have greater barriers to accessing employment and health care. People in our community may have compromised immune systems for all sorts of reasons from higher rates of cancer, smoking, HIV/AIDS, and even daily stress. The AIDS pandemic we have battled for the past 35+ years underscored the life-and-death significance of fair access to the best quality-assured medicines and diagnostics to ALL in need.

CLASS founded Cenla Pride in 2014 as a celebration of the rich diversity of our community. Cenla Pride been successful beyond our wildest dreams, and is a testament to the love and care our community members have for one another. As Cenla Pride 2020 approaches, the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, impacting global health, and disproportionately so those among the most marginalized in our community, much like HIV/AIDS did 35+ years ago, and actions we take today to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are vital to the long-term strategy of health and safety for our entire community.

Louisiana was particularly hard-hit by COVID-19, and just entered Phase One of its Roadmap to a Resilient Louisiana on Friday, May 15, when the Stay at Home order was lifted. Although more businesses were permitted to reopen with limitations, the order specifies that Louisianans should still stay at home as much as possible to avoid unnecessary exposure to COVID-19. People who are at a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should still stay at home unless they are traveling outside of the home for an essential activity, like obtaining food, medicine or medical care.

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"Thanks to the hard work of the people of Louisiana under the Stay at Home order, we have seen declining new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. ...This is not mission accomplished or a victory against COVID-19, but it is a positive and hopeful move for Louisiana," Gov. Edwards said. "While this a step forward for our state, I want to encourage the public and business owners to proceed cautiously and to take the necessary steps to protect themselves, including wearing a protective face covering like a cloth mask when they are in public, keeping social distance from people outside of their households and practicing good hygiene."

With Cenla Pride 2020 a mere two and a half weeks away, we have made the decision to #CenlaPrideInPlace this year. Our theme for this year's Pride event is "Love Isn't Cancelled!" We believe in our community's ability to address this challenge with integrity and compassion. We must combat COVID-19 with a calm and measured response that honors our most vulnerable while still celebrating the love and diversity that led to the first Cenla Pride.

How do you #CenlaPrideInPlace? We want you to celebrate your Pride with your friends and family and in keeping with the guidelines on social distancing. What does Pride mean to you? Hanging out with friends? Musical performances? Selfies? Drag performances? Waving your flag on a walk around your neighborhood? Sending messages of love and encouragement to others? Let's harness the power of the internet to share information, connection and community.

Order your Love Isn't Cancelled! #CenlaPrideinPlace t-shirt or tank top here:

<https://www.impact-adv.com/class/>

T-shirts are available in Youth and Adult Sizes. You can have your t-shirt shipped to you or you can drive-through and pick it up at the CLASS office on Friday, June 4, 2020. Post a photo wearing your shirt with the #CenlaPrideInPlace hashtag on our Cenla Pride Facebook page.

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, MD Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease has long been a hero of the AIDS community, and he's with us now as we battle COVID-19. He's my choice as Honorary Grand Marshall of the Love isn't Cancelled! #CenlaPrideInPlace 2020 celebration.

See you in person the first weekend of June 2021!

Ann Lowrey,

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