

## Why *NO* Justice?

Since our founding in 1991, WWAV has been standing with the women of New Orleans no questions asked. We've been let into worlds that few others see, and trusted with stories that traditional public health workers rarely, if ever, hear.

But little could have prepared us for that day when 'J' arrived at one of our *Our Space* events. Barley saying hello, she pulled out her photo I.D. card, which read 'SEX OFFENDER' in block red letters. She is only 23 years old, and one month clean from a heroin addiction; the 'sex offender' label will remain on her ID until she turns 48.

Within a week of talking with 'J', we saw another one of our women who told us through tears that she was just forced to register as a sex offender based on 10 year old charges. Her entrapment in the system now won't end until 2024, when the 'sex offender' label is lifted.

Stories like these are what drive WWAV's holistic approach to harm reduction, social justice and self-care. And we know stories like these cut to the heart of your work, as well. This strategy for criminalizing certain types of sex work has emerged within a climate of persistent lack of access to culturally competent services, gender-based violence, and a lack of respect of health through harm reduction, all which make our communities **vulnerable to HIV and other preventable communicable infections.**

This law completely disconnects our community members from what remains of a social safety net, making it impossible for them to recognize their goals, dreams, and desires. That is why our women are calling this project 'NO Justice.' And it is their words that we are taking as our organizing call moving forward.

## WHO WE ARE: WWAV

\* The mission of **Women With A Vision, Inc. (WWAV)** is to promote wellness and disease prevention for women and their families living at or below the poverty line through health education, early intervention strategies, and referrals to appropriate community resources.\*

\* One of WWAV's primary strengths is its members' dedication to **building trust** and relationships in the communities we work with. The women we work with are often distrustful of outsiders, particularly African-American women, who have experienced a history of exploitation at the hands of public health workers, sex workers, and intravenous drug users, who are particularly vulnerable to stigma, law enforcement violence and incarceration.\*

\* WWAV assists women and their families by providing services to promote permanent behavior change, to empower women to make informed and safe decisions about their health, and to identify and challenge social norms and beliefs regarding acceptability of unsafe practices:

- Dissemination of information related to HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, substance abuse, treatment, testing, and other women's health issues
- Health education and promotion for the LGBTQI Community
- Facilitation of presentations, health fairs, and home health parties
- Street outreach during non-traditional hours
- Referrals to appropriate community resources
- Collaboration with community health organizations, and other community-based grassroots organizations
- Assist in online Medicaid Enrollment for women, children, and senior citizens

### Women with A Vision, Inc

215 N. Jeff Davis Pkwy  
New Orleans, LA 70119

**Web:** [www.wwav-no.org](http://www.wwav-no.org)

**Phone:** 504-301-0428

**E-mail:**

[wwavinc@wwav.nocoxmail.com](mailto:wwavinc@wwav.nocoxmail.com)



*A Project of*  
**Women With  
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## The Issue

Louisiana Statute 14:89 (A) defines a crime against nature. (A)(1) explains that a crime against nature is any “unnatural carnal copulation,” and places several qualifications on that definition. (A)(2) says that crime against nature is “the solicitation by a human being of another with the intent to engage in any unnatural carnal copulation for compensation.” (B) lays out the punishment for violations including a felony conviction, jail time, and mandatory sex offender registration. (A)(2) is the statute under which women are being prosecuted.

Prosecution under this statute and enforcement of the sex offender registration requirement involves all arms of the criminal justice system- from police surveillance and entrapment, to the district attorney’s use of the charge as a power crutch to get women to plead guilty, to the judge’s discretion in conviction/sentencing guidelines, to parole/probation’s role in enforcing the prescribed sentence requirements.

These prosecutions do not happen in a vacuum; they happen within a climate of persistent lack of access to culturally competent services, state sanctioned gender-based violence, incarceration, and a lack of respect of health through harm reduction, all which make our communities **vulnerable to HIV**. Those charged, prosecuted, and convicted under this statute are disproportionately poor women of color and trans-women of color. Most of these women, at the time of conviction, were struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, **and are cycling in and out of the criminal justice system.**

## Our Vision and Goals

Our NO Justice Project organizing and advocacy campaign seeks to end criminalization of sex work under the Louisiana Statute 14:89, or the Crime Against Nature (CAN) statute, its subsequent felony conviction and Sex Offender Registry requirements for those convicted.

We want to transform the culture of different arms of the Louisiana criminal justice system from one that focuses on incarceration of street-based sex workers to one that fosters **healing, self-care, harm reduction, and self-efficiency.**

We also wish to bring about awareness of the real economic needs of those affected, and to encourage a shift away from the criminalization of marginalized communities.

What this law does is essentially completely disconnect and isolate our community members from what remains of a social safety net, making it impossible for us to adequately make safe choices for positive, preventative reproductive health outcomes in our lives.

**We envision a world where our women have the tools necessary to advocate for themselves in the streets, in the courtroom, in encounters with the law, and in sexually at-risk situations.**



## Working for Justice

~ Our work is grounded in the lives and stories of women who are at risk for or who have already been convicted.

~ Our strategies address the statute itself, the layers of the criminal justice system, and the broader climate of gender-based violence our women are moving through.

### ~ KEY STRATEGIES

\* **Engage, support and empower** women most at-risk.

\* **Influence key players in the criminal justice system** to immediately reduce and/or halt further prosecutions.

\* **Secure a systemic challenge** to the statute through the courts.

### ~ PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

1. Conducting in-depth interviews with women who have been convicted and create a story-bank.
2. Hold Story Sharing Circles, Empowerment meetings, Community Building Events, & Self-Advocacy Trainings for women convicted or at-risk.
3. Identify and meet with key decision-makers in the police, DA’s office, courts, and parole/probation.
4. Assemble and maintain a working legal team to constitutionally challenge the statute
5. Design and execute a media campaign to influence public perception about the statute and our women.