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CONTACT

Lisa Tawil, ITVS 415-356-8383 lisa_tawil@itvs.org
Mary Lugo 770-623-8190 lugo@negia.net
Cara White 843-881-1480 cara.white@mac.com

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***Wilhemina's War* Premieres on *Independent Lens*
Monday, February 29, 2016 on PBS**

**Film Explores the Lives of a Family of Southern Black Women
Affected by HIV/AIDS**



Credit: John Baynard

(San Francisco, CA) – Each year in the United States, 50,000 people are diagnosed with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Nearly half of them live in the South, where the epidemic has taken root in rural communities like Williston, South Carolina. Through the story of Wilhemina Dixon, a one-woman army fighting for her family's survival, *Wilhemina's War* shows the devastating toll of the scourge of HIV/AIDS, one of the leading causes of death for black women in the rural south. Shot over the course of five years, the film bears witness to the resilience and determination of the human spirit in the face of tremendous adversity. *Wilhemina's War*, produced and directed by June Cross, premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, February 29, 2016,

10:00-11:00 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

The uneducated daughter of sharecroppers, Wilhemina Dixon is the 62-year-old matriarch of her family. Mina, as everyone calls her, knows little about public policy, but she knows a lot about caring for the sick. With five family members living with HIV, she is the caregiver for her daughter, Toni, a drug addict, and granddaughter, Dayshal, born with HIV. The film follows Wilhemina's efforts to care for Toni, who is becoming increasingly ill, and Dayshal, who wrestles with the normal issues faced by every teenage girl growing up — but with the additional burden and stigma of HIV.

Fighting the grim reality that awaits those living with HIV in poor rural communities with little access to health care are advocates like Vivian Clark-Armstead and her colleagues at the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council (SCHAC). The Council runs the only mobile testing van in the state. But SCHAC's efforts are challenged by lack of funding and the unwillingness of many churches to disseminate health information, or to even discuss HIV/AIDS, further driving the sick underground.

The film is set against the backdrop of political events in South Carolina, as Governor Nikki Haley rises to power and the state rejects billions of federal dollars available through the Affordable Care Act, a devastating decision to those who supported expanding Medicaid in the state, like South Carolina Representative Joe Neal, the only African American member of the legislature's Ways and Means Committee.



651 Brannan Street, Suite 410
San Francisco, Ca 94107
T. 415 356 8383
F. 415 356 8391
pbs.org/independentlens

“South Carolina would have received \$11 billion dollars, the third highest amount of any state in the nation. We turned it down,” said Neal. “We have perennial poverty. Generational poverty. And it has a cumulative effect on children and communities. This would have been a big step in eliminating some of the impacts of that poverty.”

Visit the *Wilhemina’s War* page on [Independent Lens](#), which features more information about the film.

Featured Participants

Wilhemina Dixon, grandmother of Dayshal Dicks and mother of Toni Dicks.

Dayshal Dicks, born with HIV to Toni Dicks.

Toni Dicks, Wilhemina’s daughter, who contracted AIDS from drug use and died during filming.

Vivian Clark-Armstead, coordinates testing services for the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council. In September 1999, she lost her sister to the AIDS virus.

Dr. Bambi Gaddist, Executive Director of the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council.

Representative Joseph H. “Joe” Neal, South Carolina state representative, Richland and Sumter counties.

About the Filmmaker

June Cross (Producer/Director) likes to explore complex issues through the lens of family and public health. She has won two national Emmys and two duPont-Columbia Journalism Awards. Previous work includes *The Old Man and the Storm*, which followed the travails of an extended New Orleans family for three years after Hurricane Katrina, and which premiered on FRONTLINE in early 2009 on PBS. She was an executive producer for *This Far by Faith*, a six-part PBS series on the African American religious experience that broadcast in 2003.

During her career, she completed eight documentaries for the PBS series FRONTLINE. She has also worked at CBS News, and PBS’s *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*. She is also the author of *Secret Daughter*, published by Viking in 2006, and based on an earlier documentary she produced that aired on FRONTLINE. She is the founder of the Documentary Program at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism in New York City.

CREDITS

Producer/Director

Editor

Director of Photography

Story Producer

June Cross

Robert Salisbury

John Baynard

Lisa Desai



651 Brannan Street, Suite 410

San Francisco, Ca 94107

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About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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