

November 5, 2012

Mr. John Fenoglio, Scout Executive/CEO  
Mr. Lou Paulson, Council Board President  
Mount Diablo-Silverado Council  
Boy Scouts of America  
800 Ellinwood Way  
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

Dear Mr. Fenoglio and Mr. Paulson,

We believe the decision on who should and should not participate in scouting is best decided by parents, not the national BSA board. Local parents are in the best position to choose their leaders, working in conjunction with their Chartered Organization (for example, sponsoring church, school, service club or other organization). These local leaders, in turn, are in the best position to determine Scout membership and rank advancement based on participation and merit, not discriminatory practices. We urge you and the Mt. Diablo Silverado Council to stand with us and help us change BSA's discriminatory membership policy.

In many ways, the Boy Scouts of America is a model organization. It respects diverse religious beliefs; it makes a tremendous effort to reach out to disadvantaged youth; and it provides countless hours of service to communities across the country. The scouting program is strong and positive. It provides youth with opportunities to acquire leadership skills and confidence, to work together, to experience nature, and to develop a sense of community involvement and citizenship. We have and will continue to be proud to be a part of this organization.

However, we are extremely disappointed that at the national level, the Boy Scouts of America have made sexual orientation a membership and leadership issue. We believe this policy is intolerant and wrong, undercuts the tremendous good that scouting otherwise provides, and contradicts Scouting's own values. Scouting's mission, charter, purpose, vision, and the Scouting Oath and Law are silent on sexual orientation. In the Scout Oath, one promises to be "morally straight", which is defined in the Scout Handbook:

"To be a person of strong character, guide your life with honesty, purity, and justice. Respect and defend the rights of all people. Your relationships with others should be honest and open. Be clean in your speech and actions, and faithful in your religious beliefs. The values you follow as a Scout will help you become virtuous and self-reliant."

So not only does "morally straight" have nothing to do with sexual orientation, a "morally straight" Scout will defend the rights of all people, and be open and honest in his relationships with others.

Locally, we have seen first-hand the detrimental impact this discriminatory policy has on a gay Scout, his Troop, his community, and the Boy Scouts overall – and we've been lucky. Those who created this policy could not have imagined what it's like to live it in a progressive community. We now understand this policy applies not just to leaders, but to Scouts, which for many, takes the policy over the acceptable threshold. Leaders are expected to expel scouts from their Troop after

learning a Scout is gay. How is this consistent with Scouting's ideals, and the ideals taught at school? The boy's ejection draws the community's attention to the boy's differences, giving notice and permission to kids in school to bully the gay former Scout. A 2011 Columbia University study showed gay and lesbian teens are five times more likely to contemplate suicide, and an unsupportive social environment -- including communities and schools with discriminatory policies like the BSA's -- were shown to have more suicide attempts among all teens: 20 percent more suicide attempts were reported among gays and lesbians, and 9 percent more suicide attempts among heterosexual teens. At our recent District Fireside Chat, you heard an Eagle Scout, who later came out as an adult, emotionally describe how he did not talk to his Scoutmaster for seven years for fear that the Scoutmaster he looked up to would reject him. You also heard him say "I promise you there are gay Scouts in your troops right now, and some of them think about suicide every day." Do we really need to wait for a gay Scout to commit suicide before we change this policy? We sincerely hope not.

This policy increasingly costs scouting community support, new members, corporate and private donations, and damages Scouting. Since 1986, membership in Scouting is down 35%, with the membership decline accelerating since the landmark *BSA vs. Dale* Supreme Court decision. That's before this year's re-affirmation of this policy and other negative Scouting news in the media.

We cannot discriminate and be leaders in our community, as society's values have changed. Scouts selling popcorn have had the door slammed in their face after homeowners tell them, "I hate the Boy Scouts!" And you heard volunteers say at the Fireside Chat, not only will there be fewer donations for Friends of Scouting, but there will not be volunteers to call and collect checks on behalf of a discriminatory organization. Recent Gallup and Pew surveys show 53% of America now supports gay marriage, up 15% in the last decade. A 2011 Human Rights Campaign study showed 86% of Christians believe their faith leads them to the conclusion that the law should treat all people equally, including gays. We see no reason to continue this outdated, discriminatory policy.

We request that the Mount Diablo Silverado Council communicate our views on this issue to the national Boy Scout leadership, and work with us to change this policy from within. Before the end of the year, please communicate your actions and plan in this regard. We seek your support to expedite this process.

Scouting has always been focused on providing a strong scouting program of outdoor activities, community service, leadership, brotherhood, independence and growth for the boys of our communities. We believe the organization should welcome any boy willing to try to live by the Scout Oath and Scout Law. We believe parents are in the best position to choose their leaders and members as a reflection of the communities they serve.

We look forward to working with you to create change in collaboration with the MSSC Board and BSA National Board.

Sincerely,