

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,

As a Troop Committee member of Troop 6 in Berkeley, I am writing to request that you stand with me to change the Boy Scouts of America's discriminatory membership policy that excludes leaders and members based on sexual orientation. Much of this letter is based on a sample letter I received because I agree with every single word in it, but I did feel it was important that you hear my own voice, so I've inserted "my personal stories" two paragraphs below this one. But make no mistake, Troop 6 believes the decision on who should and should not participate in scouting is best decided by parents, not the national BSA board. Further, we feel that local parents are in the best position to choose their leaders, working in conjunction with their Chartered 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 unrelated to one's qualifications as a Scout or leader.

The Boy Scouts of America is a model organization in many ways. BSA 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 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. Along with other parents in our unit, we support the BSA in many capacities, and feel that our boys have benefitted greatly from the many positive qualities of this organization.

We are, however, extremely disappointed that the Boy Scouts of America has made sexual orientation a membership and leadership issue. This policy is intolerant and wrong, undercuts the tremendous good that scouting otherwise provides, and contradicts Scouting's own values. This policy increasingly costs Scouting community support, new members, access to publicly funded facilities, and corporate and private donations. For many Americans, including many former Scouts and community members who once viewed the organization in a positive light, this policy dramatically tarnishes the perception of the Boy Scouts. This policy also discounts the important Youth Protection program, summarily discouraging young, potentially gay scouts from reporting teasing, bullying or harassment for fear of being found out and dismissed from the organization.

My personal stories emphasize these problems. I was a scout in Troop 206 in Oakland in the late 1970s and 1980s, and I really want my son to have as great (or better, actually) an experience as I had. But I have been ashamed of my involvement in scouting ever since the anti-gay policy came to light in the 1990s. I have felt that this policy can't stand, so I enrolled my son in Scouting anyway, but I don't want him to become one of the Eagle Scouts that have felt they need to return their badges to BSA (hundreds, probably thousands! <http://eaglebadges.tumblr.com/>). I get questions about scouting from many of my friends, the vast majority think I am wrong to involve myself in scouting. Interestingly, my gay friends with kids don't question my involvement. They want to be involved and get their kids in there, but most are afraid. I'd love to be able to tell them our district is making a stand. My personal belief is that if the ban were removed, there would be a flood of new membership. Certainly there would be many new members amongst my friends.

When I was old and wealthy enough to consider giving money to BSA, it didn't even occur to me that I should give money to such a discriminatory organization. My brothers had always given money yearly to BSA, but had stopped. When I got involved with scouting again, I still could not find it right to give money to the National BSA, and I currently restrict my giving to my troop and council. I had always worried that giving to the council was wrong, but now the Mount Diablo Silverado Council (MDSC) could finally be doing something that I can be proud of, and can tell my son that he can be proud of. I'd LOVE to be able to give more money to my council and the National BSA!

Society's values have changed, and discrimination of this kind is no longer tolerable in our community. We see no reason to continue this outdated, intolerant policy. We ask that you and the MDSC take a stand with us and adopt an independent rule to allow each local pack, troop or unit to determine whether or not to implement their own inclusionary membership policy. We advocate for this policy to be adopted at the BSA national level, as well. We request that you formally communicate our views to the National Council, and join together with peers from like-minded Councils and work with the National BSA to end this damaging, discriminatory policy.

Scouting has always been focused on providing a strong scouting program of outdoor activities, community service, leadership, brotherhood, independence and growth for boys. We believe the organization should welcome any boy willing to try to live by the Scout Oath and Scout Law.* We believe that BSA's policies should neither condone nor encourage discrimination.

We look forward to creating positive change in collaboration with the MDSC, its Board and the BSA National Board.

Sincerely,

Signature:

Date: Jan. 2, 2013

Printed Name: Corwin H. Booth

Unit Type: Troop

Unit Number: 6

Address: 15 The Crescent

City: Berkeley State: CA

Zip: 94708

* Our definition of the Scout Law's "morally straight" term comes from the Scouting 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." Scouting's definition of "morally straight" has nothing to do with sexual orientation. Furthermore, a Scout will defend the rights of all people. Scouts will be open and honest rather than required to conceal their sexual orientation, or the sexual orientation of others.