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January 11, 2013

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

Re: BSA National Policy on Membership

Dear Mr. Fenoglio and Mr. Paulson,

I am a Den Leader with Pack 54 in Moraga, a position I have proudly served in for the past 8 years. In that period of time, I have also served as Assistant Cubmaster for one year, Cubmaster for two years, and Pack Trainer for one year. I am also the Religious Emblems Coordinator at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Lafayette, and have been a Religious Emblems counselor for the Protestant faith for the past four years. Most importantly, though, I am the proud parent of two boys who are in scouting – one who is a Star scout in Troop 234 and the other who is a Webelos scout in Pack 54.

I am writing, both as a parent and as a committed Scout leader, regarding the Boy Scouts of America's discriminatory and unjust membership policy that excludes leaders and members based on sexual orientation. This policy is not only outdated and based on old stereotypes and dehumanizing (but persistent) fallacies about homosexuals, but I believe it is also contrary to the very values that Scouting professes to instill in young men and women. The continued adherence to this policy by the Mt. Diablo Silverado Council (MDSC) and the national office is irreparably damaging the image and place of Boy Scouts in our community, and the desire of both boys and parents alike to be a part of this organization. The time to change this policy is now. I implore you to take a stand in your positions of leadership in the MDSC, and do whatever is necessary to change that policy within the MDSC, and at the national level as well.

I know that you have already received many letters setting forth the reasons why this policy is wrong and contrary to Scouting's values, so I won't reiterate those points (although I am in full agreement with those reasons). Instead, I want to give you my personal observations on how this policy is adversely affecting the Scouting program within this Council.

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In my tenure as a pack leader, I have personally seen the effect of the BSA's anti-homosexual policy on membership and programming. I know of at least a dozen families who have decided not to join Scouts because of the policy. They have stated to me that they do not feel comfortable having their sons join a discriminatory organization even though they feel the program has much to offer. This discriminatory policy puts us unit leaders at a distinct disadvantage when trying to recruit scouts, especially in the Lamorinda area where we are already vying with strong sports and other extra-curricular organizations for youth participation.

I have also seen how our community's perception and support of the Boy Scouts has deteriorated, particularly after one of Moraga's own scouts, Ryan Andresen, was kicked out of Boy Scouts for being gay.<sup>1</sup> This year, we noticed a distinct drop in Scouting for Food donations in our assigned neighborhood, and were met with a couple of negative comments (oral and written) made towards our Cub Scouts who were collecting food. Similarly, my son's troop also saw a significant decrease in the number of cars that came to its bi-annual fundraising car wash this fall after the Ryan Andresen decision.

I fear that our community's participation and support will only continue to deteriorate unless the MDSC takes a firm and public stand in opposition to the BSA's national policy of discrimination.

Indeed, I anticipate that if our Council continues to adhere to and fails to take observable steps to change the national policy, it will suffer financially. Since the Ryan Andresen incident, I have already heard many parents in my pack emphatically state that they will not give to FOS unless and until the policy changes. While I understand that FOS money stays within the Council and directly benefits our local scouting program, I fully respect and understand those who feel that their pocketbook is one of only two ways they can register their vote on this issue -- the second being with their feet. I think most will vote first with their pocketbook and, if nothing changes, then eventually with their feet.

As for me personally, I'd like you to know that I have struggled mightily over the years trying to internally justify my and my sons' involvement in the BSA when the national policy on sexual orientation contradicts my personal moral and religious beliefs. I have been telling myself that the good parts of the program outweigh the one bad policy. But I still struggle with this, perhaps more so now after Ryan Andresen, an incredibly brave and honest young man whom I knew as a Cub Scout, was denied a chance to become an Eagle Scout because of his sexual orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that, technically speaking, the BSA revoked Ryan's membership based on his alleged failure to profess agreement with the "Duty to God" pledge. But it is patently transparent to any observer that this was simply a subterfuge for the real reason -- because he came out as gay -- and an obvious attempt to avoid making this a "gay" issue. No one is buying this smoke screen, and as I discuss later in this letter, it greatly troubles me that the BSA chose to invoke the Duty to God

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I now find myself almost ashamed to say in public that I am a Scout leader. In fact, last year I removed my involvement and membership with the Boy Scouts from my resume and LinkedIn profile because I felt it was more of a hindrance to my job search than a help. It was only this past month that I put it back on my resume, but only after joining Scouts for Equality organization. I am still not particularly eager to let people know that I am involved in Boy Scouts, but at least now I can demonstrate to prospective clients and colleagues that I do not approve of or condone the national policy excluding homosexuals.

Finally, what offends me greatly about Ryan's situation is that the BSA chose to hide its decision behind a "Duty to God" justification. I am very concerned about those who are now trying to justify the BSA's discriminatory policy towards homosexuals on religious, i.e., Duty to God, grounds. I have yet to see the BSA state this overtly, but this discourse has certainly taken place among adult leaders, and it was apparent in the BSA's decision regarding Ryan.

I am very troubled with the BSA taking a position on religious views about homosexuality. The BSA is not a religious organization. It does not require Scouts or Scouters to be members of a particular religion or ascribe to a certain set of religious beliefs. All that it asks is for scouts to explore and live out their spiritual beliefs, and to respect others' religious beliefs. If the BSA, or those within its governing bodies, begin to define or dictate what is or isn't "right" or "moral"<sup>2</sup> under the Duty to God pledge, then it is violating the tolerance for other beliefs that is required under the Scout Law.

I am a life-long Christian and I definitely don't want the BSA telling me or defining for me how God views homosexuality. While I respect my brothers and sisters who may believe otherwise, the God I believe in and worship not only created, but also loves and accepts, all as they are – including homosexuals. This is the position of my church, it is supported in the Bible and in the life of Jesus, and it is my personal belief. I simply cannot abide by the BSA telling me otherwise, just as those who believe that homosexuality is a "sin" likely cannot abide by the BSA telling them otherwise. On this, I believe there is common ground. This is why I believe that each unit should be permitted to make its own decisions on participation and membership, and that the BSA's current exclusionary policy should be abolished and should remain silent on the issue.

For these reasons, I join the many others within our Council (and nationwide) who urge you to take a stand to oppose the BSA national organization regarding its policy of discrimination. I ask you to take steps to adopt within the MDSC an independent rule to allow each local pack, troop or unit to determine whether or not to implement their own inclusionary membership policy. And, finally, I urge you to advocate for this policy to be adopted at the BSA national level, as well. The time for action is here. I hope you will be a force for change.

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<sup>2</sup> I have also heard those who attempt justify the policy to exclude gays on the grounds that it violates the Scout Oath's promise to be "morally straight." As has been pointed out by many others, this argument is intellectually dishonest and without any historical or logical foundation.

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Yours in Scouting,

Mark D. Fenske

cc: Mary April, Aklan District Executive