

LA Boy Scout Group Pushes to Welcome Gay Adults

The western Los Angeles County branch of the Boy Scouts of America has become the latest chapter to break with the national organization over its proposed lifting of a ban against gay scouts while continuing to exclude homosexual adults as troop leaders.

The council, which represents more than 14,000 Scouts and ranks as the nation's 14th-largest scouting chapter, called for the Texas-based youth organization to go further by welcoming gays into the ranks of its adult volunteers as well.

In issuing its declaration on Tuesday urging a "true and authentic inclusion policy," the Los Angeles group joined at least two branches in New York state that have pushed for allowing gays to work as troop leaders or staff members.

The Boy Scouts of America holds its annual national meeting on May 23 in Texas, where a resolution will be voted on that would end the century-old group's policy denying membership to youths on the basis of sexual orientation.

The compromise proposal unveiled last month, which stopped short of allowing gay adults to work within the organization, drew criticism from both gay rights groups that want the scouts to go further and conservative religious organizations that sponsor troops and want no change to existing policy.

Alan Snyder, chairman of the board for the Western Los Angeles County Council of the Boy Scouts, said the members of his chapter's board have for more than a year discussed what should be its stance on the role of gays.

"We're hoping that by being visible on the issue, we can encourage others to have the temerity to join us," Snyder

said.

The council is backing a resolution stating that no youth or adult shall be denied membership “as a leader, volunteer or staff member solely based on their sexual orientation or preference.”

Patrick Boyle, author of the book *Scouts' Honor*, about sexual abuse in the organization, said groups within the scouts, such as the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, have long called for being more accepting toward gays.

“Normally it’s just one voice in the woods, but now they’re joining a much larger chorus so it might have a little larger impact now,” he said.

The conservative Family Research Council earlier this year ran an advertisement in the newspaper *USA Today* urging the Scouts not to change their policy on gays.

“As a father, I wouldn’t want my sons to go on a camping trip with a teenage girl and stay in the same tent. Similarly, I think it’s unwise to put boys or young men in a tent with boys or young men who are homosexual,” said Rob Schwarzwald, senior vice president for the Family Research Council.

Editing by Steve Gorman, Scott Malone and Maureen Bavdek

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