

Should Gay Men Be Allowed to Donate Blood?

Family Research Council (FRC) Senior Fellow Peter Sprigg testified Thursday at a hearing of a federal advisory committee that heard reports on the latest research related to blood donations by men who have sex with men (MSM). Currently, men who have had sex with men since 1977 are barred from donating blood because they are at a higher risk for contracting HIV.

Sprigg also testified in 2010, when the Advisory Committee on Blood and Tissue Safety and Availability of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services voted to recommend no change in lifetime donor deferral for MSM, but also called for research into alternative screening methods. Addressing the meeting of the committee in Rockville, Md., Sprigg said:

“There is no question that the use of donated blood tainted with HIV would be a threat to public safety. There is also no question that men who have sex with men are at a much greater risk of being infected with HIV. While there is also no question that we have made tremendous advances in the treatment of HIV infection, advances in the prevention of high-risk behaviors have lagged behind.”

“In September,” he continued, “the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] reported that men who have sex with men are still at the center of the HIV epidemic in the United States. Just 2 percent of the U.S. population, they accounted for 63 percent of all new HIV infections in 2010 and 52 percent of people living with HIV infection in the United States in 2009. From 2008 to 2010, the estimated number of new HIV infections rose 12 percent among MSM overall and 22 percent among young MSM (aged 13 to 24 years).”

"There is little evidence that a change in the lifetime deferral policy is needed to maintain an adequate blood supply," he continued. "As *The Washington Times* reported this week, medical advances mean that the demand for donor blood is decreasing. Furthermore, only 0.4 percent of all blood donor deferrals are because of the exclusion of men who have sex with men."

"No reasonable concept of social justice requires expanding the pool of potential blood donors. On the contrary, social justice requires that only the needs of potential blood recipients be considered at all; and it requires that national policy ensure the maximum level of safety that is consistent with maintaining an adequate blood supply," Sprigg concluded.