



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

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February 3, 2017

Dear Chartered Organization Representative,

As you have no doubt heard by now, our organization has announced a change in the way we will consider the membership eligibility of boys who are looking to join our programs. This is what we at the Baltimore Area Council know thus far:

Late Monday afternoon (evening our time), the BSA made an announcement regarding how we consider transgender youth in our program.

Our National Office provided media with the following statement. It is recommended that you forward questions to me or you can work through PR@scouting.org.

This is the BSA's statement:

As one of America's largest youth-serving organizations, the Boy Scouts of America continues to work to bring the benefits of our programs to as many children, families and communities as possible.

"While we offer a number of programs that serve all youth, Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting are specifically designed to meet the needs of boys. For more than 100 years, the Boy Scouts of America, along with schools, youth sports and other youth organizations, have ultimately deferred to the information on an individual's birth certificate to determine eligibility for our single-gender programs. However, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently, and these laws vary widely from state to state.

"Starting today, we will accept and register youth in the Cub and Boy Scout programs based on the gender identity indicated on the application. Our organization's local councils will help find units that can provide for the best interest of the child.

"The BSA is committed to identifying program options that will help us truly serve the whole family, and this is an area that we will continue to thoughtfully evaluate to bring the benefits of Scouting to the greatest number of youth possible – all while remaining true to our core values, outlined in the Scout Oath and Law."

Below is a message from our Chief Scout Executive Michael Surbaugh:
https://youtu.be/d_sR0z506No

Today an additional statement was sent to all Councils from Chief Scout Executive Michael Surbaugh with further details as well as an attachment of Frequently Asked Questions. The current communication is:

"As I am sure you are aware by now, the BSA announced earlier this week that going forward, applications would be processed in accordance with the gender identity shown on the application. This means that transgender boys may participate in the Cub and Boy Scout programs.

On behalf of the National Key 3, we apologize that we were not able to communicate this action in advance. This issue was being discussed by the National Executive Committee earlier in

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January as a result of a highly-publicized case in New Jersey that prompted a lawsuit that we were notified about last Friday. News of the lawsuit required an expedited decision so as to avoid protracted litigation and unfavorable media attention. To be clear, the BSA has never had an official policy on gender identity. Rather, it used a procedure that ultimately relied on the information available on birth certificates. Given that some states allow the gender on a birth certificate to be changed and some states, including New Jersey, prohibit gender identity discrimination, it was determined that the BSA would comply with state law and revise its registration procedures accordingly.

We believe this change brings us in line with the majority of our faith-based partners and their practices. Few, if any, major religions refuse to minister to, or serve, transgender people. An unwillingness to serve transgender youth in our single-gender programs would be inconsistent with the welcoming practices of most faith communities.

Attached please find some Q&As for your review and use in your council. We hope these answer many of the questions you may have about this issue. Tomorrow, preliminary guidelines will be distributed to council professionals that can be used to appropriately prepare for a transgender youth who may want to join Scouting.

These guidelines are meant to be used on an as-needed basis and are not for broad distribution. Additionally, we expect to be revising these guidelines as we all gain experience in this area since there is no consensus among experts, schools or others regarding best practices in providing a welcoming and safe environment for transgender youth.

We know it is important to provide information to units as quickly as possible, and we hope the attached Q&A document will meet that need at this time. We also believe the guidelines will provide council professionals with the information they need to assist units and leaders with related issues on a case-by-case basis.

Overall, most Scouters, donors and communities have seen this as a very positive move to help us grow stronger and serve more youth. We fully understand the sensitivity and complexity of this issue, but our mission and the times demand that we continue to develop America's youth notwithstanding the social issues and challenges that confront us.

The BSA cannot resolve those issues, and our nation cannot afford for us to let these issues deter us.

Thank you for your strong support and continued service to Scouting as we move forward."

I understand that this announcement leads to questions being asked and raised and we will again to our very best to share details as they are shared at the local level. Please let me know if you have any personal questions or concerns. Thank you for all that you do to offer a quality Scouting to the youth in Central Maryland.

Sincerely,



Brian L. Steger
Scout Executive & CEO

Q&A – Eligibility Requirement Updates

Understanding the Decision

Q. What is the BSA's policy on allowing transgendered youth as members in Scouting?

- A. The BSA does not have a policy on transgender youth. For more than 100 years, the BSA, along with schools, youth sports and other youth organizations, have ultimately deferred to the information documented on an individual's birth certificate to determine eligibility for our single-gender programs, such as Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. However, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently, and these laws vary widely from state to state.

Q. What is changing?

- A. Starting today, we will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual's application. BSA local councils will help facilitate locating units that can provide for the welfare and best interest of the child.

Q. Why are you making this change?

- A. For more than 100 years, the BSA, along with schools, youth sports and other youth organizations, have ultimately deferred to the information documented on an individual's birth certificate to determine eligibility for our single-gender programs. However, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently, and these laws vary widely from state to state.

Q. What programs does this impact?

- A. This change to eligibility requirements will impact single-gender programs – Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are year-round programs specifically for males in the first grade through age 17. This change does not impact STEM Scouts, Exploring or Venturing.

Q. Can an individual who was born a girl but identifies as a boy join Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts?

- A. Yes. We will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual's application.

Q. Can an individual who was born a boy but identifies as a girl join Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts?

- A. No. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are year-round programs specifically for males in the first grade through age 17. We will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual's application. Transgender girls can join STEM Scouts, Venturing and Exploring, since these programs are available to females.

Q. Is there a benefit to making this decision?

- A. We hope that the change in our approach in determining eligibility will enable us to bring the benefits of our programs to as many children, families and communities as possible, and we encourage all interested, eligible youth to apply. Transgender youth face many struggles daily — at school, in their communities, and even at home with their parents and families. They are more likely to be harassed, have higher rates of depression, high levels of anxiety and are more likely to commit suicide than other children. At school, the atmosphere for many is hostile, and it may be even worse at home or in their communities. While it is understandable that our Scouting family may be concerned about how to best serve a transgender boy in Scouting or how welcoming a transgender boy in the program may impact a unit, these statistics shed light on a group of kids that could benefit tremendously from the benefits of Scouting in building character and leadership, as well as the supportive camaraderie and community that results in our units.

Q&A – Eligibility Requirement Updates

Q. How can this decision be made without my unit's input?

A. While individual units (e.g., Packs, Troops, etc.) are locally associated with community organizations, local councils and units are chartered by the national BSA organization. This means that youth who register to participate in a Scouting program are registered as part of the national organization, which sets eligibility requirements for all councils and participating units. Decisions made regarding participant eligibility are made according to the national requirements – not at the local council or unit level – which do not discriminate with respect to gender identity. If a unit does not think it can offer a safe and welcoming environment, then BSA local councils will help facilitate locating units that can provide for the welfare and best interest of the child.

Q. Is there mounting pressure to be more inclusive and change your policies again?

A. We understand and appreciate that the values and the lessons of Scouting are attractive to the entire family, so we are committed to identifying program options that will help us truly do so. This is an area that we will continue to thoughtfully evaluate in order to bring the benefits of Scouting to the greatest number of youth possible.

How the Decision Affects My Unit

Q: How does this impact religious organizations who sponsor Scouting?

A: While religious partners will continue to have the right to make decisions based on religious beliefs, we will work with families to find local Scouting units that are the best fit for their children. If a religious organization declines to accept a youth or adult application based on their religious beliefs, they should notify the council so that a unit open to accepting the individual can be offered as an option.

Q. Will non-religious chartered organizations be allowed to determine eligibility?

A. As with all Cub Scout packs and Boy Scout troops, volunteer leadership of each unit determines their ability to provide a safe and effective program for the youth who seek membership. Further, decisions made regarding participant eligibility are made according to the national requirements – not at the local council or unit level – which do not discriminate with respect to gender identity. If a unit does not think it can offer a safe and positive environment for these youth members, then BSA local councils will help facilitate locating units that can provide for the welfare and best interest of the child.

Q: What additional Youth Protection Training is needed as a result of this decision?

A: No additional Youth Protection Training is needed; however, it is appropriate to have a heightened sensitivity for youth safety precautions. The Center for Disease Control and other experts have reported that transgender youth are at a significantly higher risk of abuse at the hands of other youth than are other boys. This risk increases as boys grow older and the Scouting program provides more opportunities for youth to be outdoors with less direct supervision. The BSA's Youth-on-Youth Training Materials (available at <http://www.scouting.org/Training/YouthProtection.aspx>) are designed to help adult leaders prevent and react to youth-on-youth incidents that might occur within the context of Scouting, especially in a camping or overnight setting.

Q&A – Eligibility Requirement Updates

Q: If a transgender boy decides to join our troop, how will we know how to handle the issues that may arise while camping and on other outings?

A: When considering Scouting for a transgender youth, the youth's parents must have an initial discussion with the council and unit addressing the following questions: 1) Is the child living culturally as a boy? 2) Is the child recognized by his family as a boy? And 3) Is the child recognized by his school and/or community as a boy? Living culturally as a boy generally includes dressing as a boy, using a culturally accepted male name or nickname, parents/caregivers using male pronouns when referring to the child, and being considered "a boy" in his daily-life.

The matters set out in the *Transgender Guidelines* (available to local council professional staff) must be discussed and agreed upon by parents, unit leaders, and the boy before the boy joins. This agreement will include a plan that defines expectations for managing the Scouting experience so as to create a welcoming, safe environment. As part of the guidelines, a council professional must be involved in the initial assessment of whether the unit can or will accept the youth and whether there is sufficient common ground to put together an effective plan to address personal privacy, including bathroom and sleeping arrangements.

Q: What bathroom should a transgender boy use? What about tenting/sleeping arrangements?

A: Matters of personal privacy, including bathroom and sleeping arrangements, will be addressed by customized plans developed with input from the transgender boy and his family. More details about the contents of the plan are available in the *Transgender Guidelines* (available to local council Scout Executives.)

Q. Will you provide a list of inclusive units?

A. We don't keep such a list, but we will work with families to find local Scouting units that are the best fit for their children.

Girls in Scouting

Q: Doesn't this decision effectively allow girls in the Cub Scout and Boy Scout program?

A: No, transgender boys are considered boys. This is a legal decision that many states have adopted. Although we previously referred to the information documented on a birth certification to verify eligibility, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently.

Q. Can an individual who was born a boy but identifies as a girl join Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts?

A. No. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are year-round programs specifically for males in the first grade through age 17. We will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual's application. Transgender girls can join STEM Scouts, Venturing and Exploring, since these programs are available to females.

Q. What Scouting programs are available to young women?

A. The BSA offers programs for girls and young women through Venturing, STEM Scouts and Exploring.

