



MEMORANDUM

To: Provider Executive Directors and Board Chairs

Gladys Carrión, Esq.
Commissioner

From: Gladys Carrión, Esq., Commissioner

150 William Street
18th Floor
New York, NY 10038

Date: April 16, 2014

Re: LGBTQ Policy & Practice Initiative

212-341-0903 tel.
212-341-0916 fax.

This memorandum confirms and underscores my fundamental belief that every child, adolescent, and adult interfacing with New York City's child welfare and juvenile justice systems receives affirming services regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Administering affirming services requires the highest level of professionalism, commitment, and skills from ACS and provider leadership and staff, along with foster parents and volunteers alike.

We know from research and our own personal experiences that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) children and youth are overrepresented in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. One study found that 26 percent of young people who come out as LGBTQ to their families of origin are forced to leave their homes, and another 78 percent of LGBTQ youth experienced some form of anti-LGBTQ bias or harassment in their foster care placement.¹ Additionally, 13-15 percent of youth currently in the juvenile detention system identify as LGBTQ even though they represent only 5-7 percent of the nation's overall population.²

The data demonstrate that our goal to improve services for LGBTQ people is warranted and desperately needed to improve upon the existing safety nets available to LGBTQ young people experiencing any form of family rejection. Given the harsh realities so many LGBTQ children and youth involved in our systems experience, I urge you all to continue collaborating with our Office of LGBTQ Policy and Practice to sustain and expand upon our efforts to improve the safety, well-being, and long-term outcomes for the LGBTQ people we work with daily.

Leadership matters, which is why I am directly communicating with you and encouraging your agencies to sustain and enhance our ongoing collaborative efforts to improve services for LGBTQ stakeholders in the following ways:

¹ See Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, *Youth in the Margins: A Report on the Unmet Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescents in Foster Care*, (2001): <http://nwnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2006-NCLR-LGBTQ-Youth-in-the-Foster-Care-System.pdf>.

² See the Center for American Progress, *The Unfair Criminalization of Gay and Transgender Youth: An Overview of the Experience of LGBT Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*, (2012): <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/report/2012/06/29/11730/the-unfair-criminalization-of-gay-and-transgender-youth/>.

Enhance Workforce Development

It is critical that staff working directly with our families understand how to translate our policy expectations into their daily practice. Training is one of the best ways for staff to access and utilize skills obtained to better assess and serve the needs of each child without bias or discrimination. Thanks to the commendable efforts of the LGBTQ Point Person Network – a collaborative effort between your agencies and our Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice – I am pleased to learn of the comprehensive LGBTQ workforce development underway. To date, all of your agencies have submitted training implementation plans detailing how all staff will be trained on our policy expectations using the model ACS LGBTQ curriculum. Our goal is to train all staff by November, 2014. Many of your agencies are on target to meet this ambitious and attainable goal. After November, we plan to offer a “training of trainers” for select staff at each agency to sustain these trainings in 2015 and beyond.

Target Foster Parent Recruitment

All children deserve loving and supportive care when they are unable to live with their families of origin, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. I remain committed to only placing LGBTQ young people in homes that are affirming. An affirming home is one that welcomes, respects, and diligently works to meet the specific needs of an LGBTQ young person. For this reason, I require that all newly certified foster parents must be LGBTQ affirming. I urge all of our provider partners to utilize our [LGBTQ affirming home finder's guidance](#) when screening prospective foster parents. Additionally, we require that existing foster parents receive our LGBTQ training when obtaining annual recertification. This training provides existing foster parents with the knowledge and skills to affirm their foster child in the event that they should come out as LGBTQ.

To help identify more affirming foster parents, our Parent Support and Recruitment Unit will have an elevated presence at upcoming LGBTQ pride celebrations. We are specifically prioritizing foster parent outreach in all five boroughs. Given that prospective LGBTQ foster parents are six times more likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to foster, we will continue making diligent efforts of recruiting and supporting LGBTQ people throughout the certification process.³ I strongly encourage all provider partners to send their home finding staff to LGBTQ pride events in an effort to expand upon the existing pool of LGBTQ affirming foster parents.

Support Provider LGBTQ Point People

Given the significant strides that so many of your agencies have made to improve LGBTQ services over the past year, it is clear that we must make every effort available to sustain the LGBTQ Point Person Network. For this reason, I encourage you to continue supporting your agencies' designated LGBTQ Point Person, and giving them the necessary leadership authority to serve as a change-agent within your agency. This means that your designee serves as a liaison between our Office of LGBTQ Policy and Practice and your executive team, and receives the support necessary to help drive service delivery improvements for LGBTQ stakeholders engaged

³ See the Williams Institute, *LGBT Parenting in the United States*, (2013): <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Parenting.pdf>.

in your agency's services. Should staff leave or grow out of this particular role, it is critical that you help develop a LGBTQ Point Person succession plan to ensure ongoing communication with our Office of LGBTQ Policy and Practice.

We ask that you notify all young people placed with your agency of the existence and role of your agencies' LGBTQ Point Person. Each young person must be provided with the means necessary to access this person in order to report issues, complaints, or concerns. One way to informally share this information is through hanging up our "ACS Safe Zone" posters at all of your facilities in clear view in group settings. These posters indicate who the LGBTQ Point Person is along with their contact information. They also signal that the designated point person is ready, able and willing to talk any young person about their lives, including any challenges relate to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Schedule Youth Ally Trainings

I am deeply committed to amplifying the voices of the children and youth involved with our child welfare and juvenile justice systems. To that end, I am pleased to learn more about the activities of our LGBTQ Youth Advisory Council. This group of dedicated youth advocates meets bi-monthly to discuss ways to improve the child welfare and juvenile justice climates for LGBTQ young people. This year, the LGBTQ YAC plans to train young people placed with your agencies on ways to stand up and be a LGBTQ ally. The YAC believes that if more young people had the skills to safely intervene when witnessing any form of bias or discrimination targeting LGBTQ youth, the overall climate could begin improving for all young people. I am enthusiastic about this project, and urge each of you to support it by asking your LGBTQ point people to schedule a peer ally training at your agency.

Report LGBTQ Incident and Inquiries

In our first year implementing our LGBTQ Policy, we have received 130 questions about policy implementation concerns, and 40 requests for specific technical assistance on how to comply with the policy. Half of the 130 questions we received about policy implementation came from your agencies. Most agencies asked for support with our training requirements, how to identify LGBTQ affirming service referrals, and asked for transgender and gender non-conforming specific resources. Additionally, 75 percent of the 40 requests for technical assistance came from your agencies. Most of the agencies requested assistance with making an affirming placement, reimbursing transgender healthcare expenses, supporting LGBTQ foster parents, and addressing school-based bullying.

I am pleased that so many of your agencies are utilizing the expertise of our Office of LGBTQ Policy and Practice, and encourage you all to continue reporting to ensure that our policy is being put into practice. I would like to see more young people utilizing this reporting process, and encourage you all to continue distributing our [*Know Your Rights*](#) youth palm cards. Many of your point people have made significant strides in distributing thousands of these palm cards to young people involved with your agencies, and my team is happy to supply more of these resources upon request.

Distribute LGBTQ Affirming Resources

Last June, we launched Children's Services LGBTQ web portal - www.nyc.gov/acs/LGBTQ – an online clearinghouse that brings together in one easy to navigate location a wealth of LGBTQ resources, support, and guidance for young people, families, and child welfare and juvenile justice practitioners. The LGBTQ web portal shares resources, policies, and promising practices especially meaningful for the LGBTQ children, youth, and adults involved with Children's Services. Content on the site includes our [Know Your Rights](#) electronic palm cards, support for families with LGBTQ children, and extensive community resources available for practitioners seeking LGBTQ affirming referrals. It also offers information on how to [report incidents of bias, harassment, and discrimination of LGBTQ stakeholders](#) that may lead to an investigation.

I encourage your agencies to take advantages of the resources offered on our LGBTQ web portal, and of the expertise housed within our Office of LGBTQ Policy and Practice. I look forward to strengthening our collaborative efforts to improve the overall service delivery for the specific needs of every child, adolescent, and adult - no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Working alongside your agencies, we can be the reason things will be better in the future, and I am certain that we in the Administration for Children's Services are working to make it better today.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information. My direct phone number is (212) 341-0902. Thank you again for your commitment and ongoing efforts.

Sincerely,



Gladys Carrión, Esq.
Commissioner