



To: URJ Congregations and CCAR Rabbis  
From: Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman, Chair, Commission on Social Action  
Rabbi Seth Limmer, Vice Chair, Commission on Social Action  
Barbara Weinstein, Director, Commission on Social Action  
Date: August 5, 2015  
Re: Boy Scouts of America

In 2001, the Commission on Social Action sent a memo to all URJ congregations and CCAR Rabbis concerning the Boy Scouts of America policy of discrimination against gay scouts and scout masters. The memo stated, "While we maintain our hope that the Boy Scouts of America will abandon its discriminatory policies, its lack of response to the many expressions of disagreement and disappointment with the policies gives us little basis for optimism. Therefore, and with pain, we must recommend that congregations sponsoring/housing troops/packs withdraw sponsorship of a troop/pack and/or stop housing one."

We took this position based on the URJ and CCAR's longstanding commitment to ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and our support for full equality of gays and lesbians in all aspects of congregational and civic life. As a result, the overwhelming number of Reform congregations that had a relationship with the BSA severed those ties.

On July 27, 2015 the Boy Scouts of America voted to adopt a policy change in their leadership standards for adults. The new policy states: "No adult applicant for registration as an employee or non-unit-serving volunteer, who otherwise meets the requirements of the Boy Scouts of America, may be denied registration on the basis of sexual orientation." This policy change builds on a previous policy adopted by the BSA in 2013 opening its ranks to gay youth.

The BSA's new leadership standards for adults is a positive step reflecting the fact that leadership ability is never determined by sexual orientation. It assures that gay youth in the scouting movement will see themselves reflected in positive adult role models. [Scouts for Equality](#), an organization composed largely of Boy Scouts of America alumni dedicated to ending the BSA's ban on gay members and leaders, hailed the policy change. Zach Wahls, SFE's Executive Director, said in a [statement](#), "We're calling on gay Eagle Scouts, parents who are straight allies, non-profit organizations who support LGBT equality and anyone else who has walked away from the Boy Scouts to rejoin the fold. Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive Scouting movement."

There are however, two areas where the CSA continues to have concerns about BSA policy:

1. The new BSA leadership standard for adults applies only to **non-religious** chartered BSA units. As the BSA's [website](#) explains: The Boy Scouts of America issues charters to civic, faith-based, and educational organizations to operate scouting units to deliver the programs to their youth members, as well as the community at large. Over 100,000 scouting units are owned and operated by chartered organizations. Of these:
  - 71.5 percent of all units are chartered to faith-based organizations.
  - 21.3 percent of all units are chartered to civic organizations.
  - 7.2 percent of all units are chartered to educational organizations.

That means that 71.5% of units will still be allowed, if they so wish, to bar gay leaders. Different denominations, based on their faith teachings, will make their own internal decisions about what their leadership policies will be. However, at the national level, and among all non-religious chartered BSA units, no discrimination is allowed.

2. The new BSA leadership standard is silent about the participation of transgender individuals. Although the participation of transgender scouts and leaders was not part of the concerns the Commission on Social Action raised in our 2001 memo, changing times and understandings of gender and gender identity compel us to note with concern BSA's silence on this issue. We will continue to urge the BSA to have a fully inclusive policy for scouts and leaders.

After considering the BSA policy change, the response from advocates within the scouting community generally and in particular, Scouts for Equality as a leading voice within the gay scouting community, the Commission on Social Action has concluded that if a URJ congregation wishes to re-establish ties with the BSA and host a fully inclusive and welcoming unit, it should do so. However, we note with great concern the fact that some religiously chartered BSA units will continue to discriminate against gay leaders. We will continue to advocate for a fully inclusive and welcoming BSA for leaders and scouts who are gay and/or transgender, and we encourage those synagogues who elect to rejoin the BSA to participate whole-heartedly in this effort.

**The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism is a joint body of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism and its affiliates that seeks to apply the insights of Jewish tradition to domestic and foreign issues of social justice.**