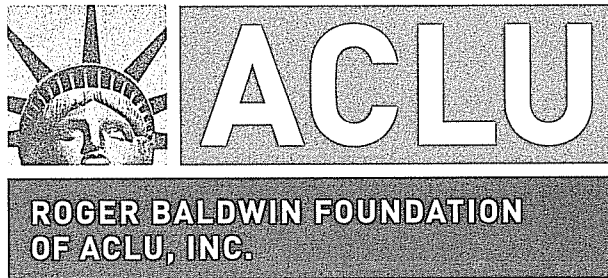


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June 13, 2007

Tami I. Cole
Director of Homeless and Domestic Violence Programs
Chicago Department of Human Services
Goldblatt's Building, Suite 240
1615 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, IL 60622

Dear Ms. Cole:

Thanks for taking the time to talk to me again about homeless shelter policies. I am very pleased to know that the City has decided to provide non-discrimination training in City shelters. I hope that the City will also consider instituting a policy to provide additional guidance to City shelters about how to prevent discrimination from occurring in the future. The trainings and policy work together to provide guidance to shelters, not just at the time of the training, but as an ongoing resource for shelter staff to ensure that shelters welcome homeless people without regard to sexual orientation, gender identity and the other categories protected under City and State law.

I have included some policies from other cities as well as some guides that help to explain the principles behind the policies and training and offer some recommendations for them. Included are transgender shelter policies from New York City,¹ Boston,² and San Francisco (a copy of which is attached). In addition, the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force and the National Coalition for the Homeless have jointly published a very useful guide, *TRANSITIONING OUR SHELTERS: A GUIDE TO MAKING HOMELESS SHELTERS SAFE FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE*.³ Two other documents that offer helpful information are the *Toronto Shelter Standards*,⁴ which includes a sample transgender inclusive policy, and the *Trans Accessibility Project* manual.⁵ Finally, I have included the press release describing the passage in New York of a family shelter policy that clarifies that lesbian and gay families who have registered as domestic partners will have access to family shelter beds.⁶ We are attempting to obtain the actual policy and will forward it if we are able to do so.

¹ Available at http://www.gaycenter.org/news/press/NYDHS_Trans_Policy.pdf.

² Available at <http://www.transgenderlaw.org/resources/transprotocol.pdf>.

³ Available at <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/TransitioningOurShelters.pdf>.

⁴ Available at <http://www.queensu.ca/humanrights/tap/1intro.htm>.

⁵ Available at http://www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/shelter_standards.pdf.

⁶ Available at

www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/advocacy/resolveuid/70d225427d12ff71a61838e8b23db55a

You said when we spoke that you did not believe that a policy was necessary, since the City has a non-discrimination law. There are a number of reasons why a non-discrimination policy is important notwithstanding the existence of the law as shown by the common practice among employers to establish such policies notwithstanding the existence of nondiscrimination laws. Employers establish policies and conduct training to prevent discrimination from happening rather than waiting for it to result in litigation. They act proactively to make sure that staff know what the law requires and the disciplinary steps that will result if the policy is violated. Training and well-written policies work together to help prevent discrimination.

In a homeless shelter, these proactive measures may be even more important than in the typical employment setting, because homeless people rarely have the time, resources, or knowledge required to pursue a complaint of discrimination. Training of staff helps to prevent discrimination and policies provide a resource for staff to consult after the training has been completed. The existence of the policy communicates to staff that the shelters commitment to prevent discrimination is ongoing. Effective training and policies do a much better job of preventing discrimination than does the threat of litigation by itself.

In addition, a transgender shelter policy helps to address the confusion and potential hostility that shelter staff and residents often exhibit towards transgender guests by educating staff about what it means to be transgender. When shelter staff note some degree of ambiguity in a person's gender presentation, they are sometimes confused, for example, about where that resident should be housed. It is important for shelter staff to understand that transgender women and men should be housed according to their gender identity to the greatest extent possible. In addition, other shelter residents may treat transgender guests with open hostility or even violent assaults. Transgender guests are among the most vulnerable individuals in need of shelter, and shelters must take steps to make sure that their safety and privacy are protected. A transgender anti-discrimination policy and training serves these goals by:

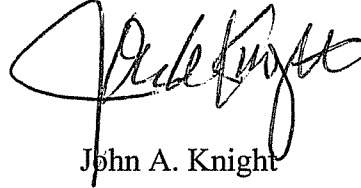
- Making clear to staff the importance of taking steps to make sure that transgender residents know they are welcome;
- Educating staff about the need to consider the safety of transgender guests, who may, for example, need to be offered a bed space in close proximity to the night staff;
- Reducing the likelihood of harassment against residents, including transgender guests, by making clear that such harassment will not be tolerated and reminding staff of their obligation to prevent residents from harassing one another;

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- Increasing the staff's and other residents' knowledge of transgender issues. Confusion and misunderstanding about what it means to be transgender are often the primary source for hostility and discrimination. Increased understanding will help prevent this harmful conduct.

I am very happy to know that the City of Chicago is working to prevent discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender residents of homeless shelters. I hope that this letter and the enclosed materials will assist and inform the City's efforts. I trust that you will let me know if I can offer any additional assistance in the form of proposing a specific policy, commenting on one drafted by others, or working to put together a group of stakeholders from organizations who share the commitment of the City to preventing discrimination against homeless persons.

Sincerely,



John A. Knight

Enclosures

cc: William W. Greaves
Director/Community Liaison
City of Chicago Commission on Human Relations
(w/enclosures)

Angela C. Thomas
Deputy Corporation Counsel
Labor Division
City of Chicago Law Department
(w/enclosures)