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**Date:** May 31, 2013  
**To:** National Council Members; National, Region, Area, and Council Key 3's  
**CC:** Regional Directors, Area Directors, and Scout Executives  
**From:** Gary Butler, Assistant Chief Scout Executive, Operations  
**Subject:** Membership Standards Update

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On behalf of the Boy Scouts of America, a special thanks to all who participated in the Membership Standards Study Initiative.

On May 23, 1,232 voting members of the Boy Scouts of America voted on a resolution that maintains its current membership policy for all adult leaders and states that youth may not be denied membership in the BSA on the basis of sexual orientation or preference alone. The resolution passed with 757 votes, a 61 percent majority.

Through the process, the BSA conducted the most comprehensive listening exercise in its history, gathering perspectives from inside and outside of the Scouting family. This policy remains among the most complex and challenging issues facing the BSA and society today. To help move the organization forward and to refocus our attention on our mission, the BSA will approach this issue in both the short term and long term.

The BSA will continue to post information on the implementation of the new policy on Scouting.org.

Once again, thank you for your service to this initiative and to the young people we serve.

Yours in Scouting,

Gary Butler  
Assistant Chief Scout Executive  
Operations

## **Amended Membership Standards Policy(s)**

The adult membership standards policy was not under consideration and remains unchanged, as follows:

*While the BSA does not proactively inquire about the sexual orientation of employees, volunteers, or members, we do not grant membership to individuals who are open or avowed homosexuals or who engage in behavior that would become a distraction to the mission of the BSA.*

Effective Jan. 1, 2014, the youth membership policy will be:

*Membership in any program of the Boy Scouts of America requires the youth member to (a) subscribe to and abide by the values expressed in the Scout Oath and Scout Law, (b) subscribe to and abide by the precepts of the Declaration of Religious Principle (duty to God), and (c) demonstrate behavior that exemplifies the highest level of good conduct and respect for others and is consistent at all times with the values expressed in the Scout Oath and Scout Law. No youth may be denied membership in the Boy Scouts of America on the basis of sexual orientation or preference alone.*

### **What This Means**

It is imperative to clearly understand what this policy means along with what changes and what does not change.

#### What has not changed:

- The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.
- Scouting's vision is to serve every eligible youth in America, and this policy would allow it to serve more kids and focus on their development.
- The Scout Oath begins with duty to God, and the Scout Law ends with a Scout's obligation to be reverent, and that will always remain a core value of the Boy Scouts of America.
- Any sexual conduct, whether homosexual or heterosexual, by youth of Scouting age is contrary to the virtues of Scouting.
- The BSA handbook defines morally straight as, "Scouts should be clean in speech and actions and faithful in religious beliefs," and a clean Scout as "someone who keeps his body and mind fit, chooses friends who also live by high standards, and helps keep his home and community clean."
- Members must demonstrate behavior that exemplifies the highest level of good conduct and respect for others and is consistent at all times with the values expressed in the Scout Oath and Scout Law.
- The BSA has stringent policies that protect the safety and privacy of youth and adult members and has always worked to ensure that it is a supportive and safe environment for young people ([www.bsayouthprotection.org](http://www.bsayouthprotection.org)).

- The organization will maintain its current membership policy for all adult leaders and within the framework of this policy chartered organizations have the right and responsibility to choose their own unit leaders. The Boy Scouts of America fully supports our chartered organizations.

### **What has changed:**

- Youth are still developing, learning about themselves and who they are, developing their sense of right and wrong, and understanding their duty to God to live a moral life. Accordingly, a youth member simply stating he or she is attracted to the same sex, but not engaging in sexual activity, does not make them ineligible for membership.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

Understandably, a change to the BSA policy raises many questions among parents and unit-serving volunteers. The following are FAQs and answers.

#### **1. Is the BSA endorsing homosexuality and forcing its chartered organizations to do the same?**

No. That is not the role of the organizations, and Scouting is not the place to resolve divergent viewpoints in society. By reinforcing that Scouting is a youth program, and any sexual conduct, whether heterosexual or homosexual, by youth of Scouting age is contrary to the virtues of Scouting, and that no member may use Scouting to promote or advance any social or political position or agenda, this policy rightly recognizes there is a difference between kids and adults while remaining true to the long-standing virtues of Scouting.

#### **2. If a chartered organization does not agree with allowing gay members, can it deny them membership or defer them to another unit?**

No. Effective Jan. 1, 2014, no youth may be denied membership in the Boy Scouts of America on the basis of sexual orientation or preference alone. However, any sexual conduct, whether homosexual or heterosexual, by youth of Scouting age is contrary to the virtues of Scouting. As they always have, chartered organizations can require members to demonstrate behavior that exemplifies the highest level of good conduct and respect for others and is consistent at all times with the values expressed in the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

#### **3. How does the BSA define “morally straight”?**

The BSA handbook defines morally straight as, “Scouts should be clean in speech and actions and faithful in religious beliefs,” and a clean Scout as “someone who keeps his body and mind fit, chooses friends who also live by high standards, and helps keep his home and community clean.” Any sexual conduct, whether homosexual or heterosexual, by youth of Scouting age is contrary to the virtues of Scouting.

#### **4. Why was the policy amended only to include youth and not adults?**

The review confirmed that this remains among the most complex and challenging issues facing the BSA and society today. Even with the wide range of input, it was extremely difficult to accurately quantify the potential impact of maintaining or changing the current policy. While perspectives and

opinions vary significantly, parents, adults in the Scouting community, and teens alike tend to agree that youth should not be denied the benefits of Scouting.

## 5. What will you do when a youth member becomes an adult?

When a member is no longer a youth participant, he or she must meet the requirements of our adult standards.

## 6. What are the next steps?

The policy change will be effective on Jan. 1, 2014, allowing the Boy Scouts of America the transition time needed to communicate and implement this policy to its approximately 116,000 Scouting units. As the National Executive Committee just completed a lengthy review process, there are no plans for further review on this matter.

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### **Additional Resources**

The BSA has been and remains committed to engaging in discussion with its members about this policy. To learn more about the policy, please visit [www.bsamembershipstandards.org](http://www.bsamembershipstandards.org). Also, following are additional helpful resources.

### **Viewpoints**

Since the National Voting Members of the Boy Scouts of America passed the membership standards resolution on May 23, 2013, the BSA has received numerous statements from community and religious organizations in support of the change. You can read those statements on the [membership standards web site](#). We'll continue to add statements as we receive them.

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### **In the News**

- *The Baptist Standard*: [An Open Letter to Southern Baptists](#)
- *The Washington Post*: [Catholic Church sees 'hopeful future' in the Boy Scouts, even if openly gay scouts allowed](#)
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints *Newsroom*: [Church Responds to Boy Scouts Policy Vote](#)
- *The Deseret News*: [What the Boy Scouts of America decision means for your son](#)

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## Refunds and Cancellation Policies

### Membership Fee

The BSA is not able to offer refunds of annual membership fees.

The Membership Fee Refund Policy is as follows:

*The annual BSA membership registration fee for leaders and members is a non-refundable administrative fee. However, fees processed in error are refundable subject to the local council's completion and submission of the proper refund request form. Units, leaders, or members that are involuntarily separated from BSA membership as a consequence of behavioral or other policy violations will be issued prorated refunds for the remaining period of their registration.*

### Activity Fees

Questions about refunds for activity fees are handled on a case-by-case basis and should be directed to the local council.

### Supply

Information on returns and exchanges on merchandise can be found at [www.scoutstuff.org/retail/returns](http://www.scoutstuff.org/retail/returns).

## Refunds and Cancellation Policies of the BSA's High-Adventure Bases/Jamboree

### High-Adventure Bases

If you receive inquiries about the cancellation policies of our national high-adventure bases, please direct those questions directly to the bases.

### Jamboree Cancellation Policy

The cancellation policies for participants and staff can be found on the jamboree website. The links are listed below.

#### Participants

<https://summit.scouting.org/en/Jamboree2013/Documents/JamboreeCouncilGuide.pdf>

#### Staff

<https://summit.scouting.org/en/Jamboree2013/Pages/Staff-Fees.aspx>