

## **Boy Scouts of America affirm ban on gay members and volunteers**

**By: Amanda Holpuch, The Guardian**

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Critics call decision to keep gay men and lesbians from participating a 'missed opportunity of colossal proportions'

The Boy Scouts of America will uphold the organization's ban that prevents gay people from being members of the organization, after concluding a confidential two-year review.

An 11-member committee formed in 2010 unanimously agreed to uphold a ban that prevents "open or avowed" gay people from being part of the youth organization.

In a statement released to the Associated Press, the Scouts' chief executive Bob Mazzuca said the policy is supported by most Scout families:

"The vast majority of the parents of youth we serve value their right to address issues of same-sex orientation within their family, with spiritual advisers and at the appropriate time and in the right setting. We fully understand that no single policy will accommodate the many diverse views among our membership or society."

Incorporated in February 1910, more than 2,720,000 youth members and more than 1 million adult members are currently part of the organization which is meant "to provide an educational program for boys and young adults to build character, to train in the responsibilities of participating citizenship, and to develop personal fitness".

In 2000, the supreme court ruled in *Boy Scouts of America v Dale* that the organization could bar gay men and lesbians from being troop leaders as it is a private organization. The ruling argued that forcing the organization to accept them would violate its First Amendment rights to freedom of association and free speech.

Yet the court's decision did not stem campaigns to reverse this position, which has attracted increased attention as stories surfaced of openly gay members being removed from the organization. A Missouri Boy Scout who was with the organization for more than 10 years was recently kicked out after coming out to the camp director.

Jennifer Tyrell lost her position as den leader of her son's Cub Scout group, once they learned she was a lesbian. In response, Tyrell started a petition to reinstate her volunteer position on [change.org](http://change.org), which has received over 300,000 signatures.

Tyrell also launched a separate petition directed at national board member Randall Stephenson asking him to get the organization to bring an end to the policy, which has received over 79,000 signatures. According to the AP, Stephenson is on track to become the president of the Boy Scouts national board in 2014.

Last week, Stephenson's fellow national board member Ernst & Young CEO James Turley released a statement saying he believes an inclusive environment is important to society and said that dropping the policy is an important move for improving the organization.

The Human Rights Campaign president Chad Griffin said: "This is a missed opportunity of colossal proportions. With the country moving toward inclusion, the leaders of the Boy Scouts of America have instead sent a message to young people that only some of them are valued. These adults could have taught the next generation of leaders the value of respect, yet they've chosen to teach division and intolerance."

Boy Scouts of America have also come under scrutiny by atheist and agnostic groups, who are similarly barred from joining the group.

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