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Conn. officials fight anti-Scout policy

WRITTEN OATH
MAY BE REQUIRED
OF FUNDRAISERS

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HARTFORD — The Boy Scouts councils in Connecticut may have to practice their own motto, "Be

Prepared," if they continue to refuse membership to gays.

State officials have stated publicly that they're looking at fundraising organizations that make donations to Boy Scouts chapters because its national policy denies membership to gays.

The scrutiny by the state could lead to a requirement

that the United Way and other non-profits would have to submit a written statement that they and their benefactors are complying with Connecticut's anti-discrimination laws to maintain tax-exempt status.

CONN. COURTESY PAGE 14

CONN., CONT. FROM COVER

Cynthia Watts Elder, director of the state's Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO), was quoted by the Associated Press as saying that allowing Boy Scouts to participate in the United Way paycheck deduction program may violate Connecticut's anti-discrimination laws.

Elder in a letter to Connecticut's State Employees' Campaign for Charitable Giving committee, wrote, "Allowing the Boy Scouts of America to benefit from a fundraiser that uses state resources including the solicitation in [state] employees' paychecks potentially makes the state a party to discrimination."

Nancy Wyman, the state comptroller and a committee member of the CHRO, agrees with Elder that each participating charity should put in writing that they're complying with state law. She was quoted in the same Associated Press story as saying that her position is "one of intolerance for discrimination, not intolerance of the Boy Scouts organization." She added, "I believe this matter to be of such magnitude as to warrant exploration of the possibility of cessation of this year's [state employees' Charitable Giving] campaign funds to the Boy Scouts of America."

Harry L. Pokorny, chief executive officer for the Boy Scouts of America's Three Rivers' Council in East Hartford, told the AP he would be "disap-

pointed" if his organization is removed from the charity's list of recipients. He said he didn't know how much the state's employee charity program contributes to the Boy Scouts, but one United Way official said the total was at least \$25,000. Pokorny added, "We have no choice, it's a national policy the local council must follow. We cannot change our policies. But we do not ask the sexual orientation of any one who wants to join, and I don't believe we have ever denied anyone membership."

The Connecticut State Employees' Campaign for Charitable Giving committee began examining the United Way's donation's list after the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the Boy Scout's policy of banning gays was unconstitutional. The New Jersey decision was the first time a high court in any state has ruled that the Boy Scouts have to open its doors to gay members and leaders.

Steve Rosentel, chairman of the United Way's board of directors, has stated he supports, in general, the Boy Scout's programs, but he doesn't support any form of discrimination. In a letter to the Boy Scouts' regional council, the United Way has asked them to reconsider its policy banning gays. Although the letter didn't go so far as to say it would cut off funding, it did state the policy of excluding gay boys and leaders may be inconsistent with the

United Way's mission.

This past year, 12 United Way offices in 37 towns in western and central Connecticut gave local Boy Scouts councils approximately \$250,000 to help fund their \$3.1 million dollar annual budget.

Meanwhile, Doug Krofina, executive director of a Fairfield County Boy

Scout council told the AP that the organization has no intention of changing its policy. "The Boy Scouts believe, and I believe, we have a constitutional right to select our membership."

Krofina's comments came just days before the announcement on Jan. 14 that the U.S. Supreme Court will review the New Jersey decision. The

court will hear arguments in April and most likely issue a decision by July.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Connecticut State Comptroller Nancy Wyman confirmed that she's pursuing this issue to ensure that non-profits comply with the state's anti-discrimination laws.