

Boy Scouts lifts ban on gay adult leaders

Policy change ends official prohibition on gay Scout leaders but allows local units to make individual decisions

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The Boy Scouts of America ended its ban on gay adult leaders on Monday, dismantling a policy that has deeply divided the membership of the organization. The Boy Scouts' national executive board ratified a resolution that was unanimously approved by the organization's executive committee on July 13 . The organization had urged an end to the ban because of a "sea change in the law with respect to gay rights."

The decision follows the landmark ruling in late June by the U.S. Supreme Court allowing same-sex marriage nationwide. In May the Boy Scouts' president, former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, called the ban "unsustainable" and said it needed to change.

The organization, 105 years old and based in Irving, Texas, lifted its ban on gay youths in 2013 but continued to prohibit the participation of openly gay adults.

The selection of Gates as president of the organization last year was seen as an opportunity to revisit the policy, since he helped end the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, which barred openly gay people from serving in the U.S. military.

The Boy Scouts of America, whose stated mission is to prepare youths for life and leadership, has 2.5 million youth members ages of 7 and 21 and about 960,000 volunteers in local units, according to the organization's website.

The anticipated end of the ban had been welcomed by gay rights advocates and criticized by conservatives.

Zach Wahls, an Eagle Scout and the executive director of Scouts for Equality, has labeled the ban a “towering example of explicit, institutional homophobia.”

John Stemberger, the chairman of the Christian youth outdoor program Trail Life USA, a breakaway group from the Boy Scouts, said on Friday that lifting the ban is an affront to Christian morals and will make it “even more challenging for a church to integrate a [Boy Scout] unit as part of a church’s ministry offerings.”

The policy change means that the Boy Scouts will no longer prohibit gay adult participation and will allow local units the latitude to whether to allow gay leaders in their troops.

“The BSA national policy that prohibits gay adults from serving as leaders is no longer legally defensible,” the organization said in statement earlier this month. “However, the BSA’s commitment to duty to God and the rights of religious chartered organizations to select their leaders is unwavering.”