

Colonial Virginia Council Scouting Leaders and Parents:

I want to first thank you for your involvement in our Scouting program. I have spent the last two days and this morning communicating with colleagues and volunteers around the country as well as several discussions with the National BSA office as I tried to gather as much helpful information as possible. I appreciate your patience while this was completed.

That said, I know you have many questions about the decision that was announced Monday night earlier this week. I hope to provide a little more information regarding the decision itself and also let you know what I know on our path forward.

Monday evening, our national Chief Scout Executive announced an immediate change in membership policy that will allow transgender boys (a person identified biologically when born as a girl who now identifies as a boy) to join our gender specific programs of Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting. In the past, the BSA along with schools, youth sports and other youth organizations have referred to the information provided on an individual's birth certificate to determine eligibility in gender specific youth programs, although I can say that in 20 years of professional Scouting, I have never asked to see a person's birth certificate when they registered to be a youth member of the BSA. However, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently, and these laws vary widely from state to state. Starting today, the Boy Scouts of America will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual's application. BSA local councils have been asked to help facilitate locating units that are the best fit for the youth member.

There have been questions raised about how this decision will affect our local chartered organizations. Here is an excerpt from the National BSA Charter and Bylaws of the Boy Scouts of America: "No church or religious organization holding a valid charter shall be required to accept as youth members or adult leaders any person whose espoused personal beliefs are in conflict with the chartered organization's religious principles." This is interpreted this to mean that a religious chartered organization who uses the Scouting program as part of its youth ministry may limit membership in their Scout unit based on those religious beliefs. We see this, for example, in cases where a church limits their Scout unit membership to church members. Additionally, the BSA has agreed to indemnify religious organizations who limit their membership consistent with this interpretation in good faith and so long as decisions on membership are not used as a basis for intentional discrimination. This above listed agreement has existed since the 2013 and 2015 membership policy changes. If a religious organization declines to accept a youth or adult application on religious grounds, they should notify the council so that a unit open to accepting the individual can be offered as an option.

So, how do we move forward? I wrote to a unit leader in another council earlier this week saying that the core program that achieves the mission and objectives of Scouting we offer our Scouts this week and will offer in the future has not changed from that which was offered last week, last month or last year. The decision made on Monday night will likely not create programmatic changes just as the membership decisions of 2013 and 2015 did not either. What will change will be some adjusted guidelines and policies related to the youth protection and privacy topics as we implement the changed membership policy. You have asked me about tenting accommodations, restroom and shower facilities and other similar adjustments with our outdoor program that need to be addressed and while I do not have the answers today, I will have them soon and will share them with you as I receive them.

In closing, our Scouts and our communities need the Scouting program today more than ever in history. No other youth program has the level positive impact on youth as ours does. Scouting transforms youth into young adults, prepared to be successful in the ever challenging world they will grow up in and maybe raise a family in. We as Scout adult volunteers and those employed by the local councils, both year round and seasonal camp staff, have an amazing opportunity to help develop the next generation of leaders. I always told my summer camp staff members that you will probably never know the difference you make to the Scouts that come to camp and are in your merit badge classes. You will not realize that you inspired and made feel successful on individual Scout, so treat every Scout as that individual so you do not miss the opportunity to change a life. It is my hope that our greatest resources, our volunteer adult leadership, decide to stay with the Boy Scouts during this time and continue to make that positive impact in the Scouts you see each week. More than likely, none of our units will see a transgender youth join, just my speculation, I could be mistaken. To have our Scouts potentially miss out on your ability to help develop them into better people and leaders because of this membership policy change is saddening. I hope that you will stand with us as we cross these waters of change and rededicate to continue to deliver the promise of Scouting and teach our Scouts character, citizenship and fitness.