

Sample Truman Scholarship Policy Proposal—Student #1

To: John Office

Office Held: United States Senator (R, state name)

Issue: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights

Problem Statement

One of the most urgent problems within the United States is the discrimination faced by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community, who are routinely denied equal civil rights protections. Discrimination against LGBT people is legal in thirty-four states (NGLTF, 2004). According to the American Psychological Association, over one-third of LGB African-Americans and more than one-half of LGB White Americans have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

Discrimination occurs in many arenas including public accommodations, housing, school and employment. For example, within medical settings, about one-third of LGB physicians and medical students surveyed reported that, because of their sexual orientation, they had been denied employment, refused medical services or a loan, denied a promotion or referrals from other physicians, or were fired from their positions (Schatz and O’Hanlan, 1994). Discrimination affects the mental health of LGBT individuals, their access to equal opportunity, and their job performance (Waldo 1999). It hurts the children who cannot access medical benefits from their LGB parents and creates an American culture that is exclusive and divisive (HRC 2003).

Proposed Solution

According to political scientist Alan Yang, people are most accepting of LGBT people when they have a relationship with a member of the LGBT community (1997). It is only when LGBT people feel comfortable coming out to their friends, family and employers that our society will truly become supportive of this population. This means that a comprehensive federal anti-discrimination bill including protection for LGBT people in employment, public accommodations, housing and education must be passed.

It is absolutely necessary that LGBT have a legal remedy for the discrimination they are faced with in the same way that people of color are protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Research indicates that places of employment with anti-discrimination policies shower higher job satisfaction and commitment among LGB people (Burton, 2001). This is further supported by research showing that LGB people are more likely to report discrimination in places of employment that do not have policies against discrimination based on sexual orientation (“Support for ENDA,” 2003). According to these findings, LGB people are also more likely to be comfortable in their academic and living environments when non-discrimination policies exist.

Your recent support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act is commendable, but this bill is not sufficient. It only protects LGBT people against employment discrimination. A bill must be drafted that prohibits discrimination in employment, public

accommodations, housing and education. LGBT people must be protected in all areas of society so that they are afforded equal access to all of the United States opportunities.

Major Obstacles/Implementation Challenges

Although a 2001 Gallup Poll indicates that eighty-five percent of respondents replied yes to the question, “In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of opportunities?” there is a significant portion of Americans who believe that homosexuality is a sin (“Testimony,” 2002), and members of this group actively fight legislation to promote their views. This group is well-organized and mobilizes its grassroots efforts efficiently and effectively. This group tends to misinterpret the idea that by seeking equal civil rights protections, LGBT people are asking for special rights.

There is also a strong possibility that employers may not support this bill because they will believe that it might require them to offer domestic partner benefits to their employees. This is an added cost that may challenge small businesses in particular.

Admittedly, this is not a policy that all of your constituents support, but it is one they can all benefit from. By working towards a society that is inclusive of all of its citizens, our community is strengthened and all people are afforded their constitutional right to equal opportunity.

References, Footnotes, and Exhibits

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Sample Truman Scholarship Policy Proposal—Student #2

To: Janet Office

Office Held: United States Secretary of Education

Issue: Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Awareness in Higher Education

Problem Statement

Every child born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is unjustly handicapped by the alcohol consumption habits of his or her mother. The leading, preventable cause of birth defects in the US is alcohol, with FAS resulting in the most extreme cases (Floyd and Sidhu, 2004). Approximately half a million pregnant women report alcohol use each year, and 80,000 report binge drinking (Floyd and Sidhu, 2004).

Binge drinking among young women ages 18-44 is on the rise, increasing by 13 percent in a recent three-year period (Gardner, 2004). Binge drinking puts women at an increased risk for unintentional pregnancies and means they are more likely to drink while pregnant. These statistics are evidence of a major public health problem in the United States.

Low levels of FAS awareness in the nation ultimately contribute to the unwanted conception of FAS children. The 2002 National Health Interview Surveys found that 73% of women and only 55% of men have a measurable awareness of FAS (Nation et al., 2003), indicating that substantial numbers remain unaware of the dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Proposed Solution

My proposed solution is to increase FAS awareness in higher education. Support would be sought from the US Department of Education's Policy and Program Studies Service, as its mission statement is in line with my project goals ("US Department of Education," 2004). Monies would be requested from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), to be spent on prevention and intervention through education ("Office of Postsecondary Education," 2004). Prevention education would address both FAS and binge drinking in higher education and in future marital relations.

The awareness program would be delivered via First-Year Experience (FYE) classes, also known as First-Year Seminars (FYS). According to Bradley Cox of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students and Transition, over 621 institutions of higher education host FYE/FYS programs (Cox, 2004), making them a standardized setting for the delivery of the FAS program. FIPSE monies would be promoted to higher education institutions across the country to thereby increase FAS awareness and decrease the future conception of FAS children.

If successful, this program could be adapted for future intervention in public high schools and community colleges.

Major Obstacles/Implementation Challenges

There exist three significant challenges to the implementation of this FAS program. A realistic proposal would be needed to promote the curricular addition of FAS into FYE/FYS classes across the country. FYE courses are highly variable, both in conception and credit hours, and therefore the program will need to be comprehensive and concise enough as to be a reasonable addition.

The second challenge would include the delivery of the program by a professor. One major reason for the failure of prevention programs to date has been poorly trained presenters (Nation et al., 2003). An efficient, comprehensive training program would be needed to maximize program effectiveness. Coordination with established on-campus groups such as residence life and counseling programs would be ideal.

Thirdly, the FAS program must be established in a way pertinent to the college student's life and so that students take it seriously. College students do not engage in risky drinking habits with the intention of getting pregnant. Therefore the connection of risky drinking habits to the birth of FAS children can be difficult to establish.

References, Footnotes, and Exhibits

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- "US Department of Education Principal Office Functional Statements: Office of the Secretary & Deputy Secretary." 26 November 2004. <http://www.ede.gov/about/offices/list/om/fs_po/osods/policy.html>