



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 30, 2012

Boy Scouts Facing Pressure to Abandon Policy Against Homosexual Leaders

Following the ouster last month of a lesbian Cub Scout leader in Ohio, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) organization is facing intense pressure to abandon its long-time policy of barring homosexuals from serving as Scout leaders.

Jennifer Tyrrell, a Cub Scout den leader from Bridgeport, Ohio, was removed from that position in early April after Boy Scout officials discovered that she was a lesbian. The [Scout Oath](#) emphasizes the importance of Boy Scouts being “morally straight,” and homosexual conduct violates that value, BSA officials explained.



In 2000 the [U.S. Supreme Court ruled](#) that the BSA has the right to bar homosexuals from serving as Scout leaders, finding that opposition to homosexuality was part of the organization’s “expressive message” and to force the BSA to include homosexual leaders would violate the group’s values. Writing for the 5-4 majority in the case, Chief Justice William Rehnquist explained: “Forcing a group to accept certain members may impair the ability of the group to express those views and only those views, it intends to express.”

In explaining its dismissal of Tyrrell, the BSA said in a statement that it did not think a Scout den “is the right forum for children to become aware of the issue of sexual orientation, or engage in discussions about being gay. Rather, such complex matters should be discussed with parents, caregivers, or spiritual advisers, at the appropriate time and in the right setting.” Nonetheless, the organization said, “Scouting will continue to teach our members to treat everyone with courtesy and respect.”

That explanation was not enough for Tyrrell, however, who took to the [Change.org](#) petition website to marshal support for her effort to force the BSA to change its policy barring homosexuals. According to [Reuters News](#), Tyrrell has solicited some 280,000 petition signatures in support of her campaign, and those signatures will be presented to BSA officials at a Boy Scout leadership meeting in Florida beginning May 30. While Tyrrell said she would not be able to meet with Boy Scout officials in person, the petitions will be delivered by Zach Wahls, a 20-year-old former [Eagle Scout](#) raised by two lesbian partners he considers his parents. Wahls, who is an Iowa college student, gained national recognition last year for his plea to the Iowa legislature on behalf of same-sex marriage. As for Tyrrell’s situation, Wahls insisted to Reuters that “there’s a lot of support even within the Boy Scouts of America” for allowing homosexuals into Scouting leadership.

Among those showing their support for Tyrrell — and criticism of the BSA policy — on the Change.org petition site were others who had risen to Scouting’s highest rank. “It is stuff like this that really demeans all I worked for to become an Eagle Scout,” wrote one supporter, James Dozier. “I am so grateful for everything the Scouts taught me and I am proud about being an Eagle Scout, but this really



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diminishes everything I accomplished.”

The [Los Angeles Times](#) reported that one member of the Ohio River Valley Council of the BSA resigned his Boy Scout position in support of Tyrrell. Board member David J. Sims, a lawyer and longtime Democrat serving on the Ohio County Commission, said that while he did not personally know Tyrrell, “I felt that it was wrong that she was removed as the Tiger Cub leader solely based on her sexual orientation.”

In a [letter to Boy Scout officials](#), Sims explained: “I understand that this action was taken as a result of a standing policy of the Boy Scouts of America and that said action is legal. However, Ms. Tyrrell’s removal goes against my fundamental beliefs of how we should treat our fellow human beings and is, in my opinion, wholly discriminatory. I understand that the Boys Scouts of America is free to run its organization as it sees fit, however, I can not formally be a part of it based upon this policy.” Sims noted that he, his father, and his grandfather were all Eagle Scouts. “That is what makes this decision so exceedingly difficult and emotional,” he wrote. “However, I know that my father would support my decision.”

The BSA responded to the emotional display by noting that “Scouting is composed of millions of youth members and adult volunteers, in councils across the nation, who represent diverse communities with a variety of beliefs about this issue. We value the freedom of everyone to express their opinion and believe to disagree does not mean to disrespect.”

Deron Smith, a spokesman for the national BSA headquarters, noted of the heated debate over Tyrrell’s dismissal: “Scouting values the freedom of everyone to express their opinion and teaches its members to treat everyone with courtesy and respect at all times. The BSA sets policies that are best for its organization and membership. The BSA welcomes all who share its beliefs but does not criticize or condemn those who wish to follow a different path.”

Longtime followers of the Boy Scouts said it appeared unlikely that the organization would change its position about allowing homosexuals to serve as Scout leaders.



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