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## **YOUTH STUDY CENTER BECOMES NATIONAL LEADER WITH MODEL LGBT POLICY**

NEW ORLEANS- Recently, the Louisiana Department of Human Services and the New Orleans juvenile detention center, the Youth Study Center (YSC), introduced a groundbreaking new policy that is designed to protect the safety and dignity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth under their supervision. This policy not only oversees the protection of LGBT youth already in the custody of the system, which are estimated at 15% according to national data, but also mandates that direct care staff, supervisors, and social service providers at the detention center shall be required to undergo training to help create a safer environment for LGBT youth in their care.

The policy, which is one of the best in the country, was developed from a model policy written by clinical psychologist and national juvenile justice expert, Dr. Marty Beyer. It is impressive in its scope, providing eleven procedural guidelines that largely encompass the unique needs of LGBT youth. The policy clearly defines what qualifies as discrimination, harassment, and abuse pertaining specifically to LGBT youth, and prohibits both staff and other incarcerated youth from discriminating or threatening anyone based upon their sexual orientation or gender identity. The policy also prohibits LGBT youth from being placed in isolation as a “means of keeping them safe from discrimination,” and includes clauses that individualize housing placement that prioritizes youths’ “physical and emotional well-being.”

One of the more remarkable elements of this policy is its attention to issues concerning transgender youth. Among the many “best practice” provisions the policy outlines, it requires that “transgender youth will be called by the first name and pronoun they request even if their name has not been legally changed.” The policy also states that transgender youth will not be forced to shower or change clothing in front of staff or other youth – a situation that can be especially humiliating and terrifying for this demographic. Within the provisions of the policy, transgender youth must also be allowed access to counseling and medical attention in accordance with professional health standards. All of these are enormous steps forward, particularly for a demographic that is all too often overlooked in LGBT policy making, and for a facility still under a consent decree from a class-action lawsuit filed by the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL) in 2007.

Wesley Ware, Director of the LGBT youth organizing project of JJPL, *BreakOUT!* and former LGBT Youth Project Director, helped institute the policy. “I coordinated the investigation for JJPL’s lawsuit 4 years ago. To now be a part of making reforms at the facility, in particular for LGBT youth, has been an incredible experience. The Youth Study Center still has a long ways to go, but they’re becoming a leader with their policy reforms. Now the challenge becomes implementing the policy. Some youth have reported being held in their cells for being LGBT as recently as a few months ago, so the staff will need ongoing training and technical assistance to ensure all youth are treated fairly and appropriately.”

The facility has already trained their upper level staff and line staff on LGBT youth in the juvenile justice system.

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