



White House Aging Conference Calls for Inclusion of LGBT Americans in Seniors Policy

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by 365Gay.com Newscenter Staff

(Washington) The White House Conference on Aging is recommending that LGBT Americans be included in the official definition of minority populations - the first time the administration has considered such a move.

Once every 10 years authorities on aging gather for the White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA). They meet, present papers and make recommendations to the President and the Congress on national aging policies for the future.

But, this conference, which began in 2005 under the Bush Administration, had squelched any discussion on aging in the LGBT community. Gay activists quickly mounted a national campaign to draw attention to the plight of LGBT seniors.

In December they crashed a press conference to challenge the administration.

LGBT elders and their advocates then staged their own conference called "Make Room for All: A National Summit and Hearing on the Recommended Priorities for the WHCoA: Diversity, Cultural Competency and Discrimination in an Aging America."

The counter conference was sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and was backed by Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE); the American Society on Aging and its constituency groups, the Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network and the Network on Multicultural Aging; National Association on HIV Over Fifty; Older Women's League; and Griot Circle, among others.

The opposition has paid off. The long-awaited Final Report contains, for the first time, the explicit inclusion of LGBT elders.

Resolution 34, includes the following implementation strategy: "Expand the definition of minority populations to include — gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders [sic] and seniors with disabilities, and increase federal funding to NIH, CDC, Title 3 and other federal agencies to reduce health disparities and promote health promotion programming for all minority populations."

Advocates for LGBT seniors have called for the creation of an accepting climate among senior service providers so that gay elders are not forced to compromise their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to receive medical care and services. There also is a need for caregivers who are properly trained in working with LGBT seniors.

Additionally elder care workers say there is a need to strengthen the legal recognition of LGBT relationships, including more equitable taxation, the ability to make medical care decisions and hospital visitation rights; and the need for meaningful participation in planning.

“Our community refuses to sit on the sidelines and watch our needs go ignored,” said Amber Hollibaugh, a Task Force senior strategist and one of the nation’s recognized specialists on LGBT aging issues. “Our community’s inclusion in this final report reflects this unwavering principle.”