HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

YOUTH COMMISSION

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

PUBLIC HEARING

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER AND QUESTIONING YOUTH

TRANSCRIPT OF HEARING

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CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN:  Good evening, I'd like to welcome everyone to a historic hearing held by the San Francisco Youth Commission and the Human Rights Commission about the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth in San Francisco.

My name is Martha Knutzen. I'm the Chair of the Human Rights Commission.

I am joined tonight by two Youth Commissioners, Jesse Costello-Good and Kent Khounsombath, as well as other Youth Commissioners and Commissioners from the Human Rights Commission.

In that sense, this is an extremely historic commission, not only as a youth commission and new commission, but I think this is their first hearing. And we are very honored that they chose to join us tonight in this hearing about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth.

And this time, I'd like all the Commissioners who have joined us -- and we'll just go right around -- and if they can introduce themselves to the audience. And then we will convene the hearing.

We could start with Commissioner Santos.

COMMISSIONER SANTOS:  Hello, my name is
Santos, Mel Santos.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: If you could tell us which Commission you're from.

COMMISSIONER SANTOS: I guess it's a bit confusing because there are --

It could be confusing. There are two Commissions here.

I'm on the Human Rights Commission.

COMMISSIONER MARSHALL: Good afternoon. My name is Maritza Marshall. I'm from the San Francisco Youth Commission.


COMMISSIONER JAICKS: My name is Agar Jaicks. I'm a member of the Human Rights Commission, and I'm vice-chair of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee.

COMMISSIONER MARTINEZ: My name is German Martinez with the Human Rights Commission.

COMMISSIONER ROCHON: Rhonda Rochon with the Human Rights Commission. I chair the Employment Committee.

COMMISSIONER SPOON: My name is Sarah Spoon. I'm with the Youth Commission.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSO: My name is
Antonio Salazar-Hobson, HRC Chair of the Issues Committee.

COMMISSIONER SALIBA-MALOUF: My name is Ghada Saliba-Malouf. I'm with the San Francisco Human Rights Commission. I serve as the chair of the Youth and Education Committee.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much. I'd like to officially convene this hearing, then.

We're conducting these hearings tonight as part of a larger initiative by the administration of Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr., to focus on improving the lives of all youths in this City.

The Mayor's Office is holding a Youth Summit on October 5 and 6 of this year to establish the needs of and set the policy for all the youth in San Francisco.

Our testimony and recommendations will be submitted to this effort and become a part of the record establishing the needs of youths in the City.

Ghada Saliba-Malouf, who just introduced herself as a Human Rights Commissioner and Chair of the Youth and Ed Committee of the Human Rights Commission, has been serving on the Steering Committee of the Youth Summit and will help us to take the recommendations and policies that are suggested tonight into that Youth Summit.

I want to take this opportunity to thank her for
the work on the Youth Summit.

The Human Rights Commission has a specific mandate to focus on the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community because it has a legally mandated advisory committee on lesbian, gay, and transgender people.

That committee is composed of a diverse cross-section of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in San Francisco.

I am proud to chair this committee that meets monthly at the Human Rights Commission, to identify issues facing our community and to advocate to improve the lives of members of our communities in San Francisco.

This year, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Advisory Committee chose to focus on the needs of our community's youth.

We set this priority because our communities in San Francisco want to address the needs of our youth and improve their lives.

This year, for example, an organization that specifically works to improve the lives of LGBT youth, LYRIC, held a national conference for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, that drew over 400 people. Some of those participants will provide testimony tonight.
The LGBT Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Commission set up a Youth Task Force to organize these hearings. We opened that committee to interested members of our community, and we are pleased to receive the advice from representatives of youth service providers, including LYRIC, CUAV, Hastings Legal Clinic, PFLAG, LYFE, AQUA and others.

As the evening progresses, you'll learn what the full acronyms are for those organizations because a person will be speaking from those service organizations.

I wish to take this opportunity, though, to thank all the people who participated in the organization of this hearing and the staff of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Unit of the Human Rights Commission, led by its coordinator, Larry Brinkin, who is sitting right there, and staffed by Cynthia Goldstein and Brian Cheu.

Brian Cheu, who I think is probably running around -- he's right there -- led these activists through months of committee and subcommittee meetings that resulted in the testimony we'll hear tonight.

I want to especially thank Brian for his work tonight. Thanks, Brian.

The purpose of these hearings is to hear from youth about the special needs they have because of their
sexual orientation or gender identity.

They are our experts. And we will hear from them first tonight.

I want to thank each one who testifies for their courage and commitment to improving the lives of young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

After we hear from the youths, who are our experts, we will hear from San Francisco youth service providers to gain an understanding about the services they provide and to learn about their recommendations for improving those services.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank those service providers for the work that they do and for taking the time to help us establish a record for improving those services in San Francisco.

We have broken the testimony down to five general subject areas; first, family, housing and shelter; second, schools; third, health and mental health; fourth, youth services; and, fifth, juvenile justice.

It is my special privilege to chair the Human Rights Commission as we hear testimony on this issue.

As a lesbian political activist, who has worked in San Francisco for almost 20 years, I believe I represent the hope of all gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people who live in San Francisco, that these
hearings will play a critical role in making the lives of young gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people better than our formative years were.

I dedicate these hearings tonight to the memory of young people who did not make it out of their childhood because of the abuse they received due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Let's hope that in San Francisco we can create better lives for all of our young people.

With that I'd like to turn this over --

First of all, I want to thank, at this point also, my -- the vice-chair and acknowledge the work of Commissioner Agar Jaicks who sat with me through many of the community meetings that helped develop the testimony. And also Commissioner Jaicks has insured, through a letter that we're going to be sending to Mayor Brown, that the recommendations and findings will be inserted into the Youth Summit. I want to acknowledge his participation in these efforts.

And I know there are many people out here tonight. I want to acknowledge the presence, though, of Dean Goodwin, from the Mayor's Office, who is going to be sitting through these hearings.

Also, I think Jonnie Robinson may be in the audience, who is also a Special Assistant to the Mayor.
And I want to acknowledge the assistance and support of the Mayor's Office with these hearings.

What I'm going to do now is turn it over to my fellow commissioners, and they will be making a statement.

We first hear from Commissioner Costello-Good from the Youth Commission.

JESSE COSTELLO-GOOD

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: Good evening. And thank you for coming.

I'm Jesse Costello-Good, Secretary of the Youth Commission, and one of the two openly gay Commissioners on that Commission.

Nineteen years ago this November the first openly gay official in California was elected by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. The election of Harvey Milk marked a new era of political power for the gay community.

The following year, the Board of Supervisors passed the San Francisco gay rights ordinance, one of the first bills in the country to outlaw discrimination in city employment based on sexual orientation.

Missing from these and many other wonderful achievements by the gay community is the recognition of queer youth. To put our battle into perspective, a law that would have outlawed harassment in California public
schools based on sexual orientation was defeated in 1996, just this year.

While being a strong behind-the-scenes organizing force, gays have been continually left out of the focus of the gay rights movement.

The battle for gays in the military, for gay marriage, for job anti-discrimination legislation is all for the adult population.

While our friends in government are helping to secure for us healthy adulthood, they're not doing much to insure that we get there.

The right has been successful in making queers a taboo subject. Even in San Francisco, in 1996, adult lesbians and gay men are afraid to touch, us knowing there is a good chance they will be labelled as child molesters or recruiters.

The idea persists that gay people jump into existence at age 18. Well, I see the crowd here certainly disproves that notion. We are queer youth in San Francisco and we are underserved.

We face harassment and discrimination in schools. We have a suicide rate three times that of straight youths, and even in San Francisco, the great gay mecca, this is true.

To evoke the oratory style of the late Harvey
Milk, I want this hearing to talk about the fact that kids still get beat up in school for being out.

I want us to talk about the fact that queer youths get kicked out of their houses for being honest with their families. I want us to talk about the fact that the older gay community can't serve gay youth without being labelled as a child molesters.

And most of all, I want us to talk about the fact that -- excuse me.

I want us to talk about the ways in which San Francisco can change to better serve gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: And now, our other Youth Commissioner, Commissioner Khounsomphath.

KENT KHOUNSOMBATH

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: My name is Kent Khounsomphath. I'm the other Commissioner for the Youth Commission. I serve as the treasurer.

First and foremost, I want to thank everyone today for making it here. I want to say a special thanks to Supervisors Ammiano and Yaki for being here to show their support that gay youth do have a voice and that their needs and concerns should be met and addressed.

Second of all, I'd like to say that today is
going to be an incredible day, where San Francisco youth
will get the chance and opportunity to come up to the mike
to say what they've got to say, all these times through
their lives, growing up battling homophobia, coming out
with parents, to friends, family, being gay on the job,
it's an incredible experience.

We have a culture of our own, and today is not
only the opportunity to share our experience but to
educate others.

What is it like being gay? What is it like
being bisexual? What is it like being a woman and
bisexual or a transgender person of color? There are so
many issues pertaining to us, our culture, our race, our
background, our class, our gender, all enveloped into one
comprehensive package that, I think, we can get so much
out of it if we only take a minute to listen and
understand.

I would also like to dedicate today to my good
friend Adam, who is in the hospital right now. Fourteen
years old, he tried to commit suicide last week,
overdosing on some pills and Tylenol.

And because he's from a single-family (sic)
home, where his mom doesn't understand. It's difficult
for him. He faces the world alone, going through the
challenges and tributes alone. It was so difficult that he
chose to take another route out.

And that also reminds me that the work that I do and why I do it is because it's for the people who do not have a voice. And I'd also like to give tribute to the day to those who can't make it literally because they're no longer here. The road was just too hard and the pressure of society was just too much for one person to bear.

Today will also mark that we will not have any more excuses to say, "I'm sorry, why I didn't say anything." "I'm sorry, I didn't get a chance to hear you. Why didn't you tell me something earlier?" "I didn't know you felt this way." No more, none of that. Today, we will hear; we will understand; we will listen.

I'd also like to hear from all of you guys straight from the heart, no interpretations, no middle man, no one to speak for you, but you can speak for yourselves, from the heart.

Everything out there that we touch comes from how we feel, experiences, school, our spirit and our souls. And I ask you all not just to listen today but to feel.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

I'm going to now announce the fact that we
mentioned there are several supervisors in the audience, and give them a chance to make some comments if they'd like to. I want to also impress upon them how important, how much we appreciate all their presence here.

First of all, Supervisor Michael Yaki, who is the lead coordinator of the Youth Summit and has worked with the Human Rights Commission to work on this hearing and insure the fact that we will have the recommendations from tonight will be inserted into the Youth Summit.

So, if we could hear from Supervisor Yaki.

SUPERVISOR MICHAEL YAKI

SUPERVISOR YAKI: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

And I think I can speak certainly on behalf of Supervisor Ammiano, who will probably say it as well, that the day that the board chambers are 80 percent, 90 percent filled with young people, but young people who heretofore, in terms of government policies and programs have been an invincible community in San Francisco; that is, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, is a good day for San Francisco. It's a good day for this country.

And it is my honor to be here and support what it is that you're doing. It's funny to be on this part -- this side of the podium.
But I will say this. And that is that one thing that we have heard more than anything in the hundreds of meetings that I have had in preparation for the children and youths summit, especially what I think are some wonderful leaders, emerging leaders in our community, and those are the youth commissioners who are here today, is that we in government need to listen, not just more.

We need to listen first. We need to put our ear to the ground and understand what young people are saying to us about the conditions that they live in, the problems that they face, the issues that they're facing every day.

And then you multiply that a thousand, a million-fold for young people in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth community, because that's an even harder one for us to get a handle on simply because we have never been in this position. We have never had this opportunity. We have never had the experience of actually listening to their concerns in the way -- in the formal way, in the best way. And that's in an open process, through governmental hearings.

And I commend you for that. I will say this: I look forward to working with you and Ghada on the report that you will bring to the children and youths summit.

But most importantly, I think what this is for
San Francisco is a remarkable and historical, wonderful day, and that is where I can turn around and see all these great, vibrant young people who are here to express what they want, what their concerns are. This is a day that we know we have turned a corner in policy for San Francisco.

I salute you for that. I'm committed to working with you to empower them even further, and on behalf of the Board of Supervisors, I know that I can simply tell you that this is, I think, a great day for the City. And thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: I thank you very much, Supervisor Yaki.

Now, I see Supervisor Tom Ammiano, who would like to speak. And I want to especially acknowledge the years of work that Supervisor Ammiano has put in politically. It is work like his that has led to a day like today. So, thank you.

SUPERVISOR THOMAS AMMIANO

SUPERVISOR AMMIANO: Thank you for that.

I'm here, I'm queer and I'm questioning. I'm questioning why we in San Francisco, who have been so enlightened on so many issues around queer liberation have dropped the ball on services to queer youth.

I'm hoping that today will launch an effort where we work at concrete solutions to the many problems
faced by queer youths.

I'm heartened by the fact that there is an intragenerational queer population in this room, and that we will kick butt around some of the myths and some of the horrible stories that are told.

I want to mentor, if that is wanted. I want to listen, if that is wanted.

So, let's continue. And in the words of Harvey Milk -- and thanks, Jessie, for mentioning Harvey. You've got to give them hope. You are our hope. We are not going to continue to beat you up. We're going to continue to support you. So, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KUTZEN: Thank you very much, Supervisor Ammiano.

Now, I'd like to call on Crystal Weston, who is the aide to Supervisor Leslie Katz.

As many of you probably know, Leslie Katz is an out lesbian supervisor and, I think, one of our youngest supervisors. So she, in addition to Supervisor Yaki, are going to be working with the Human Rights Commission to make sure that our policies and recommendations are brought forward into the City policies. So, I want to acknowledge the work of Supervisor Katz in that regard.

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CRYSTAL WESTON

AIDE TO SUPERVISOR LESLIE KATZ

MS. WESTON: Thank you.

Is it possible for me to turn around because my words actually are addressed to the people behind me, or do I need to face this way?

I should face this way?

You should know that these words are for you even though I can't see you as I do this.

Thank you very much. Supervisor Katz is very happy about this hearing. She couldn't be here today, but she wanted to make certain that someone was here representing her.

I'm a legislative assistant in her office. I'm the person who answers the phone, one of the people who answers the phone when you call, opens the mail you write, and who comes to things like this on her behalf so that she can be represented.

This is really a historical conference as far as hearings. As far as I know, there has never been such a thing anywhere in the world, so we should really, really be proud about this and be very inspired. I know that I am.

What has brought us here has been giants, historical and contemporary queer giants such as James
Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Gertrude Stein, Quentin Crisp, Harvey Milk, Marlin Riggs, Essex Hemphill, Jewelle Gomez, Leslie Katz, Tom Ammiano, Susan Leal, as well as many others whom I can't name right now, but we should be very, very proud. They brought us here. We are going to take this to the next level, to the future.

So, please, I encourage you to speak out longly, loudly, strongly. Maybe not too long because I know they'll cut you off with a beep-beep, but get your ideas and your needs out, because, you as I said earlier, are the experts and we're going to listen to you.

I won't be able to stay for the entire thing, but believe me, Supervisor Katz and others will be working in cooperation with many people who will be here throughout this entire hearing to make sure that we bring back and let the world know what queer youth in San Francisco need.

So always remember that we are wonderful. We are fabulous and we are brilliant, just as we are. Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

And now, I'd like to acknowledge Bill Ambrunn, who is representing Supervisor Leal. And I don't know if Bill would like to --

Supervisor Leal is another out lesbian
supervisor, as most of you know. I want to at this point
acknowledge the tremendous amount of work she's done for
our community, which has also led to a day like today in
San Francisco.

So, thank you, Bill. And Bill says he's going
to sit here for four hours. Right? Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Okay. I'm more than
happy to open the opening youth testimony.

I do ask that any and everyone who speaks today,
please come up and state your name and spell it out for
the court reporter.

Can I have Gina De Vries.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Go ahead.

GINA DE VRIES

MS. DE VRIES: I'm Gina De Vries, G-i-n-a, D-e
space V-r-i-e-s.

My name is Gina. I'm 13 years old. And I'm a
California native. I'm also a young lesbian. I'm in the
eighth grade at a small Catholic elementary school in San
Francisco.

And this is my school picture from seventh grade
year. Seventh grade was the year I came out in school.

I'd been out to myself and to my family about a
year before. And the coming out was pretty gradual, but
it was basically something that I was determined to do.
I didn't want to lie about myself anymore. It was as simple as that. And I really don't think that I deserve the harassment that I got from my classmates, for just being honest with who I was.

Queers youth are underserved in both the public and the private school system. I'm sure that a lot of you are thinking that a religious school, in particular a Catholic school, would be worse and more conservative than a public school in terms of politics and social ideas.

But, really, harassment of queer youth is rampant in every school, public or private. I know so many people who have been beaten up or verbally abused by fellow classmates. And, you know, most of them go to public schools.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youths are being physically harassed and emotionally abused by fellow peers. And it's not fair. We don't need this as youths.

Class discussions should be made to include queer youth issues. And straight teachers should be sensitive to the fact that we exist, because we do need support. We need to be heard by the schools and the government and the community. We want a plan of action.

The harassment we are getting is unfair and something has to be done about it. Thank you.
COMMISSIONER JAICKS: I wonder if Ms. De Vries could come back up here for just a moment.

I have a couple of questions that maybe, if everybody would address, I won't repeat it every time.

One is I'm part of the special task force on the Human Rights Commission, asked for by Supervisor Ammiano and eventually passed by the Board of Supervisors to investigate -- this is not directly directed to you, but you may have some influence over and might want to comment on -- to investigate religious providers of services for the people of this City that have tenets that are anathema to the well-being -- in other words, that have policies and tenets that disapprove of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender lifestyles in living, and whether or not those religious providers that have contracts with the City can adequately provide services to those individuals that have these tenets, and whether or not those individuals who received those services feel discriminated against or feel that they have inadequate -- who don't feel comfortable in going to them. That's one thing.

If you have an opinion on it, let me hear about it; if you have friends, let them know about it.

The other thing is that we on the Youth and Education Committee -- I'll stop after all this is over because we want to hear from you -- if each of you can
address this at some point --

In the Youth and Education Committee, we have found that when a high school has a program that has theoretically enlightenment towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, that often they go back to their church or to their religious community and find that what they learned in school is directly opposite to what the church feels and that the fact it's a sin, that kind of thing.

I'd love to know whether or not any of you experienced that sort of thing.

MS. DE VRIES: I think in terms of the church and views -- views from school and from the church versus, like, public school issues and private school issues, I mean, at my school, basically students are not incredibly supportive. The teachers are more so. I think the overall Catholic philosophy at our school, the teachers don't always follow what the very strict sort of traditional Catholic philosophy is so they're very supportive.

There isn't really -- there aren't any services for gay youth at my school. It's a difficult question for me to answer because aside from LYRIC and LYFE, which comes from outside the school, I haven't experienced a lot of things in school for queer youth.
I mean, overall support from teachers has been
good, but the basic level of intolerance among students is
very depressing, and something that I think needs to be
addressed by the more supportive teachers who can do
something.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: Thank you, Gina.
At this point I'd like to call Wilson Fang.
Please introduce yourself and spell your name.

WILSON FANG,

MR. FANG: Good afternoon, my name is Wilson
Fang, W-i-l-s-o-n, F-a-n-g. I'm a facilitator for the
men's group at LYRIC. And I occasionally do volunteer
work for the Golden Gate Youth Services LYFE program.
Again, good afternoon.

When I was a young boy growing up in the
Phillipines, a relative once sent me a picture book of San
Francisco as a birthday present, and ever since that day I
dreamed of making my way to the the city by the bay.
Years later, I finally managed to cross some
11,000 miles of Pacific Ocean and make it here.

Of course, I was rather cold and wet when I
first crawled on to Ocean Beach, but it was worth the
trip.

Seriously, however, we've come here today to
talk about the plight of young lesbian, gay, bisexual,
transgender and questioning people in San Francisco. And
I am most honored to be a part of this occasion.

As you may have gleaned from the beginning of my
speech, or from what I'm wearing, I'm of Asian descent,
and one of the cornerstones of Asian culture is the
emphasis it places on family.

Now, in these times when the notion of family
values is proclaimed as near sacred, more than ever I am
proud to say that I live in San Francisco, a city that
treats all its residents, young and old, rich and poor,
native and immigrant, gay and straight, as members of one
big family, and thankfully, does not exclude people from
this family based on sex, race, background or sexual
orientation as some misguided members of American society
have been so eager to do.

Unfortunately, as in many families sometimes,
some of the members get overlooked. And that is the
situation we see today affecting queer youth in San
Francisco.

Proportionately, the resources the City
allocates towards meeting the needs and addressing the
concerns of queer youths has fallen far short of what is
truly appropriate or even adequate in some instances.

Let us look at just one issue, say health care,
for example. Although the surfeit of fliers and posters
advocating safe sex and HIV testing may lull some into
thinking that there is obviously enough being done to
safeguard the health of queer youth, health care goes far
beyond broadcasting HIV prevention messages.

It means making medical care more accessible for
queer youth, especially those who belong to lower income
groups, the unemployed, or those who have been cut off by
their families.

It means not simply plastering the town with
signs advocating safe sex, but also addressing the needs
of those who have been infected by HIV by providing
readily available counselling, medical care and
medication.

It means giving focus to taking care of not just
the physical, but the mental health of San Francisco queer
youth, by making provisions for more support and
counselling services to address the daunting emotional
hurdles that a young queer person must face.

And just as important, it means launching a
campaign to make them aware that all these services are
available to them, thus sparing them the anxiety of not
knowing where and who to turn to in times of need.

Although, thankfully, San Francisco, the
so-called City that knows how, does a far better job of
addressing the needs of its queer youth than many other
urban areas. In this case, "better than" does not equate to good enough.

There is an old Chinese proverb that states, a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. Therefore, today we challenge the City of San Francisco to join its young queer citizens as they make the journey towards the society of understanding and equality. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: Chandra Andrews.

CHANDRA ANDREWS

MS. ANDREWS: Hi, everybody. My name is Chandra, C-h-a-n-d-r-a, Andrews, A-n-d-r-e-w-s.

And I am the assistant director of our our reach program at Street Survival Project, which is a project for the Center for Young Women's Development. It's a young women's organization that focuses on services that are available to young women and queer young women.

I'm going to talk today about housing options that queer people, young people have or options that we don't have, rather.

At the age of 15, I was going to Lincoln High School. I was a freshman, and I came out to my family and friends. At the age of 16, I was kicked -- I was forced to move out of my home.

When I came out, I wasn't really thinking about
where I was going to stay, what I was going to eat and
things like that. I didn't think it was going to be an
issue. But once I moved out, once I came out, it became
an issue because I was no longer welcomed in my home.

And so who's going to rent an apartment to a
16-year-old girl, or rent or lease anything like that,
make a contract with a young person?

So, what I did was, at 16 I went to the courts
and I got emancipated. I've had to prove to a judge that
I can financially take care of myself. With some kind of
legal source of income, so I got a job. I've been working
at the Street Survival Project for two years.

And let's see, I guess I just want people to
know the importance of having options for young people
that come out because for a lot of young people that come
out, they end up getting kicked out, and there are no
resources for young people, let alone queer young people.
So that's about it.

Thank you for listening.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

I want to acknowledge the fact that Supervisor
Leslie Katz has joined us, and I want to thank you for
coming.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call David
Lopez.
DAVID LOPEZ

MR. LOPEZ: David Lopez, D-a-v-i-d, L-o-p-e-z.

I'd like to thank my fellow speakers.

I'd like to add that the silence ends here, and the ignorance stops now.

The homophobia and intolerance must come to a rest. It is time to educate and instruct and train our friends, neighbors, family and schools about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth issues.

I am here to let you know that I am not mute. My words will be listened to. I am not silenced. We are black, white, brown and yellow, Latino, Asian, Native American, Caucasian and African-American. And we are here. We are human beings.

No more second class treatment or manipulation by the uneducated that we are an abnormality or some kind of unreasoning animal.

We want youth services that will strengthen our self-esteem and our self-worth. We want youth services that will teach the illiterate, for we are shooting stars among stars. An action plan is crying out loud to be put in effect. And that is why I am here today to see a plan that will take away the issues of fear and misunderstandings of queer youth. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Adriana San Pedro.
ADRIANA SAN PEDRO

MS. SAN PEDRO: Hi, I'm Adriana San Pedro. A-d-r-i-a-n-a, S-a-n, P-e-d-r-o.

I'm here to talk about the juvenile justice system.

I am a lesbian and I've been involved with the juvenile justice system. It's been one of the hardest things in my life that I've had to deal with.

I think that a lot of adults think like, they just have this stereotype that only straight kids get on probation or get locked up.

And when they come across a queer kid, you know, who gets involved with the system, they just don't know how to deal with him or her. It just makes it really hard.

I've been locked up plenty of times. I've been in juvenile hall, and I've been really discriminated, not only by other people who are locked up, but also by the staff that they have working at these juvenile facilities.

Like, for example, I remember staff always -- they knew that I was a lesbian and I was out. And they never wanted me to share a room with any of the other girls. So they always gave me a room to myself, always. And in juvenile hall, that's like a punishment.

You want to have a roommate because you're in
there everyday all day, and you want somebody to talk to. And it was just really bad not having a person to talk to, just being locked up everyday. And it just created a lot of isolation feelings.

And like, also, they did not want me, like, to take showers with the other girls. They would have me have a special time where I could take my own special showers, like if I was some special person.

And also, like I said, you know, you also get discriminated by the straight kids. I mean, they're really homophobic or they'll -- I mean, it goes anywhere from just calling you names or making fun of you, or if they're really, like, homophobic, they'll even, like, beat you up for it. But that wasn't my case. It didn't happen.

I don't know. I just want to say that I believe that the juvenile system is just fucked up. And they don't really give a shit about youth, in general, let alone queer youth.

Come on now, I mean, dealing with straight youth is already a pain in the ass. Dealing with queer youth is out of this world.

And, I mean, yeah, we are talking here about a lot -- about making change and changing things and speaking out and whatever. Honestly, I don't even know
why I came here, because I know things ain't going to
change. It's been like this for a long time. It's always
going to be like this. And I believe that. Because we
are always going to have older people and just all these
adults thinking that they know what they are doing. And
it's not ever going to change.

And I just don't know what to do about it. It's
hopelessness. That's what I feel right now.

A lot of people here are like feeling, yeah,
this is a great fucking day. Well, no, it's not. I feel
really hopeless about this whole thing. Thanks.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: Okay. Excuse me if I
get this wrong. I'd like to call Vita -- Vitaly.

VITALY

MR. VITALY: I am Vitaly, V-i-t-a-l-y. I'm a
24-year-old queer youth and I identify as a queer youth
because I felt from my friends growing up the impact of
the testimony that I hope you are all able to feel today
from the youth that are testifying.

I also identify as a 24-year-old queer adult in
my capacity as a law clerk at Legal Services for Children.

I again witness the same discrimination and the
horrible, horrible abuse levied on lesbians, gays,
bisexuals, transgender people and questioning youths, in
schools, in shelters and in youth guidance centers, and
most horribly, in their homes if they are so lucky as to have one after they've come out.

We have already heard from the youth that have testified just before me that we need resources. Without the availability of these resources for queer youth, we cannot achieve the type of long-range action plan that I hope we are all here today to implement.

We have come here today to see this exact action plan enacted. But I'd like to stress to the Commissioners here, and I'd like to stress to the Mayor, that if these recommendations are at all heard by the Youth Summit that any kind of long-range action plan will fall flat if it doesn't also incorporate systemic changes in people's attitudes.

The term queer was once a derogatory term that has now been adopted by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning community. As a term -- as an umbrella term to encompass their own attitudes, their own feelings, their own fears of this system.

In like manner, I'd like to see the experiences of queer youths become likeable in the City. I want to see each queer youth have a likeable experience. I don't want to see it distinguished as queer.

I want to see it brought up into the forefront into the mainstream of youthful experiences, so that youth
can be looked at as youth and not queer, not strange, and not in some way different from other youth.

That's really all I have to say.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I would like to recognize Mari Rhoades, President of the Gay, Lesbian Club, City College and student council member of City College.

MARK RHOADES

MR. RHODES: My name is Mark Rhoades, M-a-r-k, R-h-o-a-d-e-s. And I'm the president of the gay, lesbian club at City College. I also am a student council member, the only student council member at City College. I think we have somewhere between -- well, there's three different estimates, 44,000, 70,000 and 90,000 students.

And what I'm speaking about here today to the board is that one thing that concerns me a great deal from a college level is that I would like, for example, when we talk about the government money they provide through grants, I would like them to broaden the meaning of what the government states as needy, especially when it comes to need-based grants.

Because what that allows, if they do not focus on gay, lesbian youth, then that allows our club, for example, to have to go around and hunt for money for scholarships, which actually, to some extent, it's very
positive because it also lets other communities of gay, lesbian projects understand what our struggles are.

      And the positive thing about that is it kind of brings our community together. But we are like all students, we need money. Why do we need the money? We need money so we can go to school and continue our education.

      And one thing that I have to commend at City College is that they provide is -- when you go in and apply, and you put your name and address at registration, they have this little service called gay, lesbian service -- a little box, you check. That allows us to know who these students are so we can help them focus on -- to know the gay, lesbian scholarships that are provided, activities, gay, lesbian students, also gay, lesbian counsellors, teachers and so forth and also African-American services and Latino services.

      Now, some people find this to be kind of a division. It does not divide. It strengthens, because when people approach school, a new school, correct? This is a first step of focusing on a new student to how they can feel comfortable.

      And that's what BiGala can give to gay and lesbian students. It's a safe place for them to get to know and understand school and to meet other friends and
meet other peers.

The second step as far as AIDS counsel -- the second step as far as AIDS counsel is what we can simply bring in -- it's very simple -- is that we work with all communities together, all clubs together.

But one thing I want to say is education is the most important thing our community needs. Education is not something that you simply -- it's just not mathematics. It is not just literature. It is motivation, understanding who you are as a person and finding your identity.

Finding who you are as a human being in the gay lesbian community is really the strong focus on giving back to our community.

And one last thing, what we need is our community to extend their hands towards us gay, lesbian youth because for all those people who died of AIDS, who worked so hard to give to move our community forward, we must continue and not forget their hard work.

I will always carry on all the hard work that every human being has fought to move our community forward, gay and straight. That is one thing that we will provide. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you, Mark Rhoades.

At this time, I'd like to, if I can, enter into
the record a letter I got from the City College of San Francisco, Office of the Chancellor, Del Anderson, who wrote a letter to support our hearings and agreed to carry out recommendations and policies that we may suggest.

I wanted to acknowledge her letter in the record for tonight and I'll submit that.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Alex Sarmiento.

ALEXANDER D. SARMIENTO

MR. D'SARMIENTO: Good evening. My name is Alexander D. Sarmiento, A-l-e-x-a-n-d-e-r, D. S-a-r-m-i-e-n-t-o.

Esteemed colleagues, friends and supervisors, my name is Alexander D. Sarmiento. I am 14 years old. I'm also a queer youth. By now, you probably know what that means.

A few days ago, I heard of the queer youth hearing, and my interest skyrocketed. So far, it has been one main goal this past week. And I am absolutely honored to speak today.

I go to International Studies Academy, a very prestigious high school, and I'm a freshman there. To begin with, I have been out to my fellow freshman class as a gay youth, but, however, that has resulted in a totally shocking result.
Some of my fellow peers have been continuously teasing me and even harassing me about my sexual identity. Some people have even tried to hook up some of my straight peers with me.

I'm absolutely not heterophobic, but I dislike their attitudes toward homosexuals and bisexuals and gender crossers. Let's say we lived in a world where everyone was gay and lesbian, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and those straight kids at my school were the last bastion of heterosexuality in the world. How would they feel? They'd feel the same way I would, being harassed and teased by a major identity.

Also, my gay identity has caused some friction in my family. When I came out to my family in January of this year, I discovered that they were absolutely homophobic and biased to the bone.

I suffered a major depression at that time, which resulted in me being sent to a hospital for the next four or so weeks, in which I made new friends who understood me and gradually accepted me for who I was.

Even though I barely see them any more, I still call them my friends and confidants, which is more than I can say for my peers at International Studies Academy, ISA.

You know, it's absolutely hard growing up in a
society where everyone is being judged for who they are.
You see, my family talks about who and what is good and
bad. I'm Philippino-American and my mom told me that
Philippino-Americans have a reputation for being so-called
gossips.

I also have my likes and dislikes, but I use
them less than my family does. Also, my family thinks
that homosexuality was the reason why Sodom and Gomorrah
collapsed, leaving the wife of lot to look around and
become Morten salt. In the words of Alicia Silvestone in
Clueless, "as if" --

I was so relieved to find out that homosexuality
was not one of the reasons why Sodom and Gomorrah
collapsed. It was only in hospitality and rape. It makes
me sick when my parents use the good book to condemn me
for being gay, not that I hate God and Jesus and all.

I would finally close with this. I wish that we
would all accept each other for who we are whether gay,
straight, bi, trans, whatever, because I'm proud as life
to be who I am. And I think everyone should be.

Thank you very much.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I would like to
recognize Hillary Brown.

HILLARY BROWN

MS. BROWN: H-i-l-l-a-r-y, B-r-o-w-n.
Hello, my name is Hillary Brown. I'm 21 years old, and I self-identify as a transgender male to female lesbian. I live with both my parents and I came out with them, like, when I was six years old. I told them I am a transgender lesbian. They said I was crazy. They said I was, like, you know, stupid. I didn't make any sense.

Well, I never told my friends until I left high school when I was 19 years old. I felt weird. I found out there was a place called LYRIC. I was like 20 years old. I felt like I found the place late. And PERS network, I go there, too.

And one day I tried to explain it to them. Most of them can't accept who I am because they all know, they think I'm a he. I'm not a he, I'm a she. I prefer a she.

Because most of my friends still call me he, but I don't hang out with them anymore. I just stay home and lie in bed most of the time. I can't make any friends. They can't accept me as a transgender. The only places I go is to LYRIC and Brothers Network.

Well, I came here because I want to speak out for all the other transgenders who are out, who are around my age, like 16 through 22. That's all I have to say.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Brett Van.

/ / / / /
BRETT VAN

MR. VAN: Good afternoon, Brett Van. B-r-e-t-t, V-a-n.

My name is Brett Van, and I'm an HIV-positive young adult in recovery.

The young adult recovery community exists in a state of limbo, balanced between programs designed for the needs of adolescents and living facilities created for adults.

Although many of us have managed to succeed in getting sober through existing services, we have found that our needs and those of addicts still using and in need of recovery could have been better met and our foundation more firmly built were there a single program with a focus on 18 to 25-year-old HIV-positive people in recovery.

The needs of young adults in recovery are special and distinct from those of adolescents and adults.

As adults, they are expected to already have a certain modicum of education, vocational skills and independent life skills.

These are often sorely lacking in the addict who has spent much of that time of learning lost in the swirling maelstrom of drug use.

As young people, their needs to recover differ
from those of older adults in rehabilitation. Young adults often need what can more closely be described as habilitation, giving them the tools and skills many adults had and lost to drugs but that the young adult never gained in the first place.

I am here representing various young adults from several recovery programs and independent living programs, to recommend the building of a single young adult recovery program, with two phases:

One, a 90-day program for recovery and a 90-day program of vocational and educational rehab, and a six-month program of assisted living and housing support.

Young adults don't have anything directly geared towards them in recovery. And the fact is, we have different needs. There is nothing available to us specifically. And often, we get lost in the shuffle. It's time for that to stop.

As a young adult, I have managed to get sober and stay sober. However, I had to fight for it. I had to struggle. And I don't want to see the people coming behind me go through the same issues.

There are four main support programs out there, Baker Place; Walden House, Inc.; Larkin Street Youth Center; and Bay Positives.

These four organizations, were they to work...
together, could back a young adult house run by a steering committee, and staffed by young adults who are in recovery, that young adults can relate to.

Please keep our needs in mind. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to recognize Chris Young.

CHRIS YOUNG

MR. YOUNG: Hi, my name is Chris Young, C-h-r-i-s, Y-o-u-n-g.

I am 16 years old and attend Lowell High School. And at our school, it's well-known for being committed in education and academics.

When I was in my health education class, they were trying to educate us about homosexuality. Our teacher was basically bashing us, and I almost took it personally. But it's just his own ignorance.

It's rather more than having the education in schools. I'd like to see the proper education in schools. I've -- I came out about a year ago. Before that I had to hide things, talk around things, I could never get to the point because I was scared of being bashed.

I would walk in the halls and hear whispers behind me, people saying, like he's a fag or any other derogatory terms.

Aside from that, I also -- I've been -- after
coming out, I started trying to go to many different
organizations, such as LYRIC or AQUA, which are some queer
youth services.

A lot of the other services I've seen are all
run from many larger organizations, such as HIV services
or such. It seems strange that there isn't any specific
organization just for youths in the community or anyone
else.

A lot of people talk about the change that
should be happening and talk about -- and those such
things. I'd like to be spared the euphemism and spared
the stories. I'd rather see it having -- see it being
done rather than hearing about it and talking about it.
Thank you.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Mona
Ford.

MONA FORDE

MS. FORD: Hi, my name is Mona, M-o-n-a.
Pretty simple. I'm a senior, thank the Lord, and one of
the several openly queer people at my school, which is
George Washington High School in the Richmond District.

I am very sheltered, and I consider myself to be
very lucky about that. I have so many resources available
to me in my school, you know. We have a gay straight
alliance. We have a peer resource center. In that peer
resource center, there's a queer awareness team. And we have teachers who are openly gay and make themselves available and visible to their students to come and talk to.

I volunteer at LYRIC. And I have an internship at Drama Divas. And I just have myself encased in this gooey, protective queer bubble, you know. And it's really good because it makes me feel really confident, and like my sexuality isn't some kind of an abomination, some kind of a freak accident, you know.

But not everybody has these types of opportunities. Not everybody has a gay straight alliance in their school. Not everybody has openly queer teachers that are going to make themselves available. Not everybody has a peer resource center.

That is where the problems arise, where some students have these opportunities and others don't. You know, why should my friends and I be among the lucky ones? Everybody should be lucky.

Everybody should be sheltered and protected and nurtured and have themselves encased in a protective queer bubble, as I like to call it, which is really just the queer community. Everybody should have access to it somehow.

And where are most queer kids? They're in
schools, right? So that's where these resources should be. You know, that is where they're going to find out about LYRIC, if we have the information in schools, stuff like that.

I just don't think I should be one of the lucky ones. I think I should be one of the many lucky ones. That's all I have to say.

CO-CHAIR KHounsombath: I'd like to call Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhran.

AHIMSA TIMOTEO BODHRAN

MR. BODHRAN: My name is Ahimsa Bodhran. First name Ahimsa, A-h-i-m-s-a. Middle name Timoteo, T-i-m-o-t-e-o. Last name Bodhran, B-o-d-h-r-a-n, as in Rachel, a-, accent, -n.

I'm an appointed member of the LGBTAC, the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Advisory Committee of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission. I'm a steering committee member of the bisexual youth initiative of Bi-Net, the National Bisexual Network.

I'm also an intern at the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention, founder and organizer of In The Mix, a monthly discussion group for queer and mixed-blood, multiracial people, and a previous volunteer at LYRIC.

I'm also 22, a Spanish, Arab-African, German Jew and Irish Catholic. I'm going to be giving personal
testimony tonight as a rape survivor.

I'm not going to be talking about the entire situation of queer youth rape survivors because I cannot represent the entire community. I can only talk from my own experience. So, that's where I'm starting off.

And also I'm not going to talk about the range of services, but what were some of the barriers I've had in approaching services and receiving services.

First off, a lot of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, queer and questioning folk have a lot of problems accessing straight services because, one, we have a tremendous, due to institutionalized oppression, shame about our bodies to begin with, fee;omg that we're either dirty or despicable.

And also there's a fear of shame, of bringing shame to our queer community in general, because of the tremendous belief that queer relationships to begin with are violent to begin with and so on.

So, there's sort of a double silence that usually comes up around that because when you speak out, you're afraid that there's -- shit is going to go down on your community.

Also, as someone who is bi, there is a tremendous problem in queer services which are very lesbian and getting non-transgender focus, so the way in
which you can get around that if you're bi and in the same
gender relationship, then you're as good as gay or as good
as lesbian, but if you're in an opposite gender
relationship or if you're out as a bisexual, that is going
to make a lot of problems you'll experience in terms of
receiving services from the queer community.

Also, there is a problem in terms of being a
young man in which all men are automatically considered
perpetrators and the tremendous focus on heterosexual
non-transgender white woman within domestic violence
agencies.

And there is a tremendous issue of ageism and
colorism, racism within the community which I cannot speak
to now, but I will be submitting written testimony to talk
about these issues.

And I would just like to end by saying, I know a
lot of other people who are rape survivors, who are not
able to come here tonight. I cannot speak for them, but
hopefully I can speak for myself. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

I'd like at this time to introduce Supervisor
Susan Leal, who has joined us. And she'd like to make a
few comments to us.

SUPERVISOR SUSAN LEAL

SUPERVISOR LEAL: Thank you, Madam Chair,
Commissioner Knutzen. I always think of you as Martha, so
it's hard for me to say that.

It's hard to follow the comments, the eloquent
comments that were just made by the gentleman who just
spoke, but I do want to say very briefly that I believe
that this hearing is long overdue.

And I want to congratulate the Human Rights
Commission for putting this hearing together. But more
importantly, I want to thank those of you, particularly
the youth, queer youth, questioning youth, the bi youth,
and their friends and supporters who have taken the time
to come here and to either make comments or just listen,
participate.

So I just thank you from me. Thank you very
much.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you, Supervisor
Leal. As I said before, when I introduced your aide, I
want to also acknowledge the fact that your years of hard
work have led to an evening like this. So, thank you for
your work, as well.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call
Yvette Robles.

YVETTE ROBLES

MS. ROBLES: Hi, I'm Yvette Robles,
y-v-e-t-t-e, R-o-b-l-e-s.
I work at the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center. I've been there for two and a half years. I'm 24 years old.

First of all, I was born in Corpus Christi, Texas. Growing up in Texas, I had always felt feminine, naturally. I really thought I was a girl and so people would point out that I was a boy and I should act like one.

No one taught me and no one encouraged me that being feminine was the way to be. It was just me.

Most of the people around me, at home and in school, would tease me and tell me that it was wrong, to start acting like a boy because I was boy, but no one ever asked me how I felt.

But I continued being me until when I was ten. I moved here to California with my father, and the cruelest stepmother and person that I've known in my life. I was very afraid of this woman. She practically raised me because my father worked most of the time.

She would mentally and physically abuse me because of how I acted and felt, constantly. I wasn't allowed to have friends and was always made to be busy around the house by doing chores, and more mental and physical abuse. After a while she pretty much drilled in my head that I was wrong. And I grew extremely afraid of
her.

At age 16, I started to pray to God that I would be quote, unquote, "normal." I tried to be this perfect heterosexual male, had a job by the time I was 16, not for me but for her.

When I was 18, I moved out on my own and coming out with these feminine feelings. I was told I was a gay man. So I went with this, but still unsatisfied because I felt like there were no other choices.

During this time, I started using drugs and prostitution on the streets until I met a transgender girl at the time who pretty much showed me the ropes to being a transgender girl, thinking that prostitution was the only thing I could turn to to support myself as a transgender girl, which I used more drugs to deal with this prostitution thing, until I met this beautiful woman, transgender woman, one day that was doing outreach on the street and gave me condoms. Her warmth made me trust her, so I started to go to her for counselling for my gender identity issue.

She helped me get off the streets and into doing outreach work and even helping me get a paid position to where I didn't have to turn to prostitution but have some income to support myself.

But what about those youth that haven't had this
great opportunity, not only because they are youth but because they are transgender?

Right now, transgenders are the most discriminated people against, not only in the hetero world, but you would be surprised by the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities, by some.

I think more transgender youth would come out if they were more accepted. We need more jobs for all youths because youth can relate to youth that have experienced or are experiencing the street scene.

And where we could go to have support groups, one-on-one counselling and housing, medical care, and just a safe place to go where we are not looked at by what is on the outside but respect what we feel inside.

Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to call Hakeem Oseni.

HAKEEM OSENI

MR. OSENI: Good afternoon, my name is Hakeem Oseni, H-a-k-e-e-m. Last name, O-s-e-n-i.

I moved to San Francisco about a year ago. I was raised in Zimbabwe, which is now the world's most homophobic country.

And I moved to San Francisco because it had a reputation of being America's gay mecca. And I wanted to
experience that, being a young queer man.

And it was fun when I moved here a year ago. There were a lot of bars, sex clubs, parties, alcohol, drugs, the new culture, and kind of almost got swept up in it, until I attended my first STOP AIDS Project meeting.

And in that four-hour discussion with other strangers from the street, we learned how to use condoms. We learned what exactly were the effects of these certain drugs that were going around the bars and the pubs and whatever have you. It was kind of an initiation into this new queer culture.

So, I signed up to volunteer for them and I am now a facilitator with Q Action, which is a young man's project at the Stop AIDS project.

The reason I did Q Action was because its focus is on young men of color, who statistically are converting at an alarming rate.

It's a means by which I get to talk to other young men of color about sex, safe sex, and sex in San Francisco. And it's a way that I help them and reinforce my own sex practices and hopefully reinforce their own safe sex practices.

Just for that, I'd like to read you some statistics. Forty-two percent of gay and bisexual men in San Francisco are estimated to be HIV positive.
The City Health Department estimates that 41 percent of Caucasian gay, bi men are infected.

Fifty-five percent of African-American gay, bi men, 43 percent of Latino gay and bi men, 35 percent of Asian Pacific Islander gay and bi men, and 50 percent of Native American gay and bi men are infected with HIV in the City.

A recent Health Department study found the virus in more than 12 percent of youth 17 to 22 years old.

The health department estimates that a thousand people will be infected with HIV this year, 1996.

Of those 650, which is 65 percent, will be gay and bisexual men. And of those 650 infections, more than half of them will be gay or bi men under the age of 26.

Thirty-three percent of men under 23 report having unprotected anal sex a year.

And there has been proof of behavior change. In 1982, the conversion rate of gay and bisexual men in the City was 20 percent. And by 1985, that had decreased to 3 percent.

So, what does this all mean? Well, the work at Q Action and the Stop AIDS Project does has helped to decrease these numbers. There is still much to be done, especially for queer youth of color and men under 25, partly because of a lot of stuff that you've heard about,
the issue of coming out, self-esteem, drug use, alcohol use, and the newness of this.

And I think that one of the greatest things that I get from organizations such as the STOP AIDS project or Q Action, LYRIC or any other of the youth organizations is a feeling of power that we, as youth, can change our community, foster a community, and work to save our community from these things.

That's all I'd like to say. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Joseph Gentry.

JOSEPH GENTRY

MR. GENTRY: My name is Joseph Gentry, J-o-s-e-p-h, G-e-n-t-r-y. I'm a youth of 19 with HIV.

Why does this have to continue to happen to the youth here in San Francisco? We need more role models, more gay and lesbian role models here in San Francisco so that youth today can feel appreciated, like there is a place for us.

I'm a young adult. I should be doing young adult things, but I can't if I'm trapped in my childhood.

I'm sorry.

(Mr. Gentry leaves the hearing room.)

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I call Gretchen Atwood.

// / / / /
GRETCHEN ATWOOD

MS. ATWOOD: That's Gretchen Atwood.
G-r-e-t-c-h-e-n, Atwood, A-t-w-o-o-d.

First, I'm going to talk a little bit about who I am and my own experiences, and then talk a little bit about my experiences as a volunteer with career agencies and youth agencies in the City of San Francisco.

Then, I'm going to end with a few specific recommendations for what the City can do to make this town a safer and happier place for queer youth.

I'm 25 years old. I identify as transgender. I grew up in a small town in Missouri and moved to the Bay Area several years ago.

Two and a half years ago, I moved to San Francisco. I'm very lucky. The two banes of my existence right now are public restrooms and job interviews. I'll explain that a little bit.

I sometimes use the men's restroom. Frequently, I prefer the women's restroom for some pretty obvious reasons. However, I rarely can go into a public women's restroom without being stared at, laughed at, or yelled at.

Try to have that at you about five or six times a week and see how much your self-esteem will not benefit from it.
I've also gone to job interviews and been shown the door before the interview even happens because of my appearance. However, I am lucky compared to a lot of people.

I'm white. I'm middle class. Having Stanford University on my resume will probably get me a few more job interviews than my gender identity and my appearance will cost me job offers.

Now, I'd like to talk a little bit about what I've learned by volunteering in San Francisco. I'm a former volunteer on the LYRIC Youth Talk Line. The talk line offers services to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth of 23 and under.

As a volunteer listener on the talk line, I have probably answered around 250 to 300 calls. I estimate that 35 to 40 percent of those calls are about gender issues.

Many of the issues that callers brought up to me had a common theme, the feeling of isolation, lack of support, lack of support from family, lack of support from the school system, lack of support from the community. Issues that were often brought up were unemployment and homelessness.

I have also volunteered as a speaker on the CUAV speakers bureau. I have spoken to roughly 15 to 20
classes, middle school and high school, in the City of San Francisco.

When I first started out as a speaker with the Speakers Bureau, I was told that we were not allowed to bring up the words, even, bisexual or transgender in the classrooms.

I do not know exactly what the reason for this was; however, the reasons that were passed down to me from several people were that those issues would just further confuse the students. That needs to change.

Another thing I noticed was that in most of the high schools, if not all I believe, there is supposedly a staff person who is the gay, lesbian liaison. I'm not exactly sure what that staff person's functions are. However, at one particular speakers bureau, that staff person from the school introduced the speakers there and could barely choke out the word homosexual.

People in those positions need to be educated, if not actually be, out queer people themselves. My specific suggestions are that -- particularly in the San Francisco Unified School District, speakers must be able to address the issues of bisexuality, transgender and transexualism, particularly if the speakers are themselves identifying as such.

I also suggest that the, quote, unquote
"sensitive" staff person to these issues be knowledgeable on all of those issues, not just gay, lesbian, and particularly, if possible, identify as queers themselves and be out.

I know as a queer person that there is very little that really could replace being able to talk to another queer person as opposed to a sensitive straight person. There is a big difference.

Lastly, I would also urge that all youth agencies particularly pay attention to issues pertinent to transgender youth. A lot of times when I talk to other trans youth, since I myself don't totally identify as youth anymore since I'm 25, I suggest that agencies understand that for a lot of youth, particularly transgender, it's very difficult to get jobs, and it's very difficult to find stable housing. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Doug Au.

A VOICE: I'm sorry. He's not here.

MR. GENTRY: I'd like to speak again.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: Go ahead.

JOSEPH GENTRY

MR. GENTRY: Again, I apologize for walking out on all of you.

The reason why I left --
THE REPORTER: Could you give your name again.

MR. GENTRY: My name is Joseph Gentry.

J-o-s-e-p-h, G-e-n-t-r-y.
The reason why I left is a fear of facing people like you, people who control my life, such as Larkin Street, which has enabled me to live in a substandard hotel with HIV in a room with no bathroom for nine months.

How can we continue to let this happen?

Rights give man the freedom to live within his shell.

Laws have already considered us as being broken.

In short, we need to be teaching our youth rights, personal space, and how to put laws back in their place so that we can have a place in the future.

The fire alarm in my room doesn't work. It has not worked since I moved in. And these are conditions in which I am expected to grow.

These things have to change if we expect our future to. We cannot afford to let queer youth of color or any youth, with the chance, to no longer have a choice. Instead of ultimatums, which they give me, of staying there or going to Walden House, we need to have alternatives to go to places like Brothers Network, LYRIC, Drama Divas, and schools.

In short, we need to be teaching our youth rights. Thank you.
CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Joseph, I would like to say thank you for that powerful speech. And I agree. It is unacceptable and intolerable. And hopefully, we will do something about it, especially with today's hearing. Thank you again for speaking.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Doug Au.

DOUG AU

MR. AU: I'm Doug Au, D-o-u-g, A-u.

I work with AQUA, which is an Asian-Pacific Island queer and questioning youth group. I run the program.

And I just wanted to say that my being here tonight is a privilege because I'm out, because I'm -- I have -- I come from an economic background that enables me to be here.

I just want to say that there are so many more youth like Joseph out there that we don't reach, that aren't in programs, that aren't even in schools.

I think that we as a community need to reach out to a lot of other communities for people who are in such social economic backgrounds that they cannot come out, that have language barriers, that cannot even say the words. With so many Asian communities, there are people who cannot even say the word queer.
I just want to say that I've been doing this work for a couple of years now, and I am still not out to my parents, because our families are so uneducated. I feel that there is so much education that needs to be done in all our separate communities. And we need to reach out to more communities.

I'd just like to also say that, you know, I'm here to ask you for more money for our programs, but I also want to ask you to fund more effective programs, looking at the programs we have now, programs like Larkin Street that really operate well and that really provide shelters for all the underprivileged kids out there.

And I want to see more programs that really empower youth, that give them the opportunity to be here to be able to come up here and stand up here and speak in front of you.

So that's about it. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to call Delphine Brodie.

**DELPHINE BRODIE**

DELPHINE: Hi, my name is Delphine Brodie.

THE REPORTER: I'm sorry. Would you say that again.

MS. BRODIE: Delphine, that's D-e-l-p-h-i-n-e.

I'm a bi dyke and triage transsexual woman.
I also speak on behalf of a lot of other young transsexual women in the City. There is hundreds of us who are so economically marginalized that we have no choice but to be working in the sex industry and to live in the worst kind of poverty.

In spite of the City ordinance that was recently enacted to protect transgenders from our job and housing discrimination, the jobs and housing markets have yet to make room for us.

There is no affirmative action programs that I'm aware of being specifically towards transgender people. And as a result many transsexual women and other transgenders like myself are forced to either stay in the closest, pre transition, so that they can keep their jobs or start working entry level dead-end jobs like telemarketing, data entry or work in the sex industry, or at best get hired as an out TS or a TG or TV and get treated tokenistically and condescendingly by politically correct employers and co-workers who would rather put a band-aid of pseudo-understanding over their ever present hatred and contempt than face the truth.

We are routinely harassed, assaulted or refused treatment. We are raped, mistreated or denied treatment by law enforcement, health care, and other kinds of agencies that are supposed to help us in the City.
I've been living as a woman for two and a half years. I've experienced everything that I've been talking about today and a lot more than I can mention in two minutes.

We need to be addressed. We need to be counted, included. We are the only people that can tell you what we're experiencing. You have to ask us. You have to talk to us. We're not going away. Thanks.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Jaron Kanegson.

JARON KANEGSON

MS. KANEGSON: Hi, I'm Jaron Kanegson, J-a-r-o-n, K-a-n-e-g-s-o-n. I'm a little nervous standing up here so I hope you can hear me.

I'm 25 years old. I'm transgender identified but not transsexual, meaning that gender identity does not fit the standard identity, but I have chosen not to alter my body with surgery or hormones at this time and do not identify specifically as male.

I am pointing that out partially because there's very little information about gender and it can be hard to figure these things out.

THE REPORTER: I'm sorry. You're going to have to slow down and speak into the mike.

MS. KANEGSON: Okay. So, I just made a quick
list of issues on my over here. There are so many that I wanted to bring up.

One is employment which has come up already. For me, any time I do a job interview I balance wearing something that I hope won't disqualify me from employment with something I hope will make me feel comfortable and I won't have to ease out as I work there, you know, into dressing in a way that I normally do.

I think employment issues are extremely important not only for gay, lesbian youths, but especially those who dress or present themselves in non-traditional gender presentations, including trans youth and transsexual youth.

And I think that your help with employment in any capacity would be extremely helpful and you should address issues not just of being gay and lesbian, but also transgender, disability, racial discrimination, et cetera, for it really to be effective.

I have in mind many male to female transsexual friends of mine who are in the sex industry and who have many barriers to other forms of employment to them.

That also brings me to the legalization of sex work which I kind of wanted to bring up because these woman who are working very hard to support themselves and who, because of their trans status, cannot walk the
streets in safety, also have to fear police harassment and arrest by police.

One many of them told me, I don't remember the exact amount but something like a first offense for prostitution is either three or five hundred dollars which just means more hours on the street to make money to pay that fine.

And there is also issues of safety and other things.

And I'm sorry. I'm running out of time. But I just wanted to quickly bring up health care. Many trans youth and adults are without, like many people in this country, without health insurance and have particular concerns when it comes to seeking health care with doctors who would be sensitive to them and their bodies.

Many woman I know who are lesbians and present in sports have not had -- who are transgender have not had checkups in years because they do not want to go to the doctor's office.

So, thanks very much.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Amy Paul.

AMY PAUL

MS. PAUL: Hi, my name is Amy Paul, A-m-y, P-a-u-l.

I guess I really wanted to share a bit of my
personal story.

In junior high and high school, I got depressed. I went to counsellors, wondering about if I was gay or not. They quickly assured them that I wasn't. I was just a late bloomer.

I finally did bloom, and thank God it was late. When I told my parents -- I'm sorry.

I was 19 when I came out to my parents. And they said you can choose that lifestyle or you can choose your family. Keep in mind that when you choose that lifestyle, when you walk out that door, you're dead to us.

Fortunately, I was in college, tuition was already paid for, so I had a place to go. I didn't know what to do for the summer. I was scared to death to tell anyone other than the person I was seeing at the time because I was afraid I was going to get that same kind of reaction.

I got depressed again, so I went to the counselling center, another benefit because I had my tuition paid for.

And then several faculty members approached me, who weren't out at school but who offered to take me in so I could figure out what to do. They took me in over the summer.

And then I ran away to law school, another place
where I could borrow a lot of money and have room and
board. And it's been a very long struggle.

My parents are Fundamentalists. I also, I
guess, was/is born-again Christian.

My sister would call me and tell me that my
parents were investigating places where they could come
and take me and put me away so they can fix me.

In an effort to try to reconcile with my
parents, I did speak to their counsellor, who was also a
born-again Christian. He gave me literature about Exodus,
which is a Christian group where they try to cure
homosexuals.

They gave me a lot of information to read. Told
me that I was going to hell. What I was doing was a sin.
It was not of God. And they were doing the best they
could to try to raise me in the way they thought I should
be raised.

And I guess the point of telling you all this is
just that if it hadn't been for those professors who
reached out to me, if it hadn't been for a counsellor that
I had in college, if it hadn't been that I was 19 and had
a pretty good sense of where I was headed, I don't know
that I'd be where I am now.

The good news is about two weeks ago I went home
and visited with my mom whom I hadn't been speaking with
for about two years. I proposed to my girlfriend. My mom said I'm glad you're happy.

So, there is hope -- not just with Prozac -- my mom. But there needs to be something in place that is not just an informal a network of people. I mean, if you get kicked out, there is nowhere to go. And you can only crash on friends' couches and floors for so long. There has to be support, counselling, scholarships, grants so people can finish their education.

And there just has to be an awareness that you are okay. You're not going to hell, just reinforce the idea that God loves you. And you can be -- you can have the faith and be queer also. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to hear from Nadya Rosen?

MS. ROSEN: Can I pass? I'd like the other person to speak, then myself.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: Okay. Erick Tyson.

ERICK TYSON

MR. TYSON: My name is Erick Tyson, E-r-i-c-k, T-y-s-o-n. I'm a native of San Francisco. I've lived here for 19 years, all my life.

I was lucky enough to have a very supporting mother and a very supporting family who accepted me as a homosexual. And I think it's a travesty when a city like
San Francisco, that has all this money and is supposedly one of the greatest cities in the world, cannot take care of its children.

I think it's really sad that I sit out there and I hear stories of what people have had to endure, but yet, you know, this city can afford to rip down freeways and rebuild them and rip them down again. You know, we're like one of the most -- California has one of the lowest educational systems in the United States, but yet we are one of the largest states.

And I want to know: Why is that? Why aren't we doing more for our gay youth? Why aren't we helping them? Why aren't there more, you know, things out there for them to do?

If it hadn't been for a place like LYRIC, I would probably end up a statistic, or I would come up here with one of these stories like this. But I have a loving mother, a loving grandmother, a loving family, loving friends, that were willing to stand by me and support me.

They made sure I went to school, had the best education, pulled me out of the ghetto so that I didn't have to become a crack slinger on the corner or just another black male locked away.

I personally think that there should be more education for queer youth. There should be more places
for queer youths to go and represent themselves.

Queer youth should have a voice in the city. I mean, hell, excuse my language, youth, in general, should have a voice in the city.

It seems like if you're under 17, you're just a social security number and nothing more. No one wants to hear what you have to say. No one really cares what you have to say. Even when you're 18, it's still the same.

When you're 19, I mean, no one really starts to take you seriously until you're 25. And then, you know, it's kind of late to connect with a lot of queer youth.

All the people here are older, on this board. And how many of you have gone out and seen what a lot of queer youth have to endure, the bashings, the prostitution, the drugs, because they have no place else to turn?

What I'm asking of this committee is that you guys listen to what is inside of your hearts and listen to these stories that you've heard and, you know, don't sit and have a closed mind. Don't sit and judge, but help the children of San Francisco, because we are the next generation. And you guys are going to have to depend on us. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to hear Tulani.
TULANI

TULANI: Hi, my name is Tulani, T-u-l-a-n-i, and I came here. I didn't expect to say anything, but I came here. I saw that, like, the Mayor wasn't here. I saw him downstairs. I mean, it seems like this is a big important event, and he's not even here.

Anyway, I just came to speak on my own experience as a gay person, a gay young black woman.

I think that a lot of times within the services that are set up and designed for queer youth there is not much sensitivity to the fact that we are all different. And that we all do sometimes need different types of services. As a person of color, I would say there is really no queer committee, I can speak for myself, for me. The Castro is not one of them.

And so I really --

Also, I just want to say that this is a place where people are supposed to have a chance to come and say what they have on their mind and stuff, but it's not very -- I don't know. It seems --

I'm not completely out. I guess I will be now.

But I just want to represent all the people who are in the position where they can't come and speak to you guys. You know, this is televised. I mean you can, you've got cable, but, so yeah.
All I want to say is I think that something needs to go towards people of color and special services for lesbians, in general. A lot of times there are services that are specifically for men, and then the women are just -- I don't know what we're supposed to do. Just something for you guys to think about. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: This concludes the portion of the hearing that has to do with the youth testifying. I want to acknowledge the courage and commitment of all the people who just spoke.

I also wanted to let Tulani know that the Mayor does plan on attending. He has had about five events tonight, but I want to make it clear that the gay and lesbian liaison to the Mayor's Office, Gene Goodwin, is sitting here and listening to the testimony for the entire evening. And we also have Jonnie Robinson here from the Mayor's Office.

As you know, many supervisors have been listening, as well. I think the powerful testimony that we have heard is going to play a large part in making sure that all the suggestions that you've heard so far are going to be heard and put into policy in the City and County of San Francisco.

At this time, we have a scheduled break.

Believe it or not, we actually finished on time, which I'm
known for, my fellow commissioners are surprised with that, with my usual ability not to finish on time.

So, we can take a planned break for about ten minutes, which I think is a good idea. When we return, we have many service providers scheduled, so over 20 or 30 people remain to speak. Their testimony is very, very important. We hope that everyone can stay and listen to that. They will tell us what they're doing now and what they would like to do to provide services for San Francisco.

I think there are refreshments for the youth in Room 410. So if people want to take advantage of that, please do so, and again, thank you, Commissioners and everybody else.

(RECESS TAKEN)

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: I'm going to resume the hearing at this time, and if I could be the first to call The Honorable Steve Phillips, who is the President of the San Francisco Board of Education.

But I want to briefly acknowledge his work and support for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community in his first term in office on the school board and acknowledge the fact that he's responsible for guiding through the renaming of the school in San Francisco in honor of Harvey Milk.
And we certainly appreciate that. That's the sort of thing that I think does provide role models to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender youth in San Francisco. And I wanted to acknowledge Steve Phillips for that work that he's done.

So, if I could call Steve Phillips, please.

STEVE PHILLIPS

MR. PHILLIPS: Good evening, I want to thank the Commission for inviting me and also commend the Commission for having this hearing and putting this issue on the agenda and on the radar screen of the community within San Francisco overall.

I really do think that much of the issues that we looked at are youth in general as a priority, and then lesbian, gay, bisexual youth; in addition to that, the questioning youth, really are issues of priority and issues of are we, as a community and those of us who are in major positions, going to make this a priority?

I think that really underlies a lot of the different efforts and a lot of the different challenges that are in front of us.

In many ways, as I look at the whole issue of changing our society to make room and space and validation for the lesbian, gay, bisexual community, it reminds me in many ways of the civil rights movement of the sixties. I
think that many of those same dynamics are present.

I think that the level of responsiveness and support and coalition that should be there should be similar as it was at that point in time, as well. I think we have to proceed in a similar fashion to transform our institutions in a similar way, both in terms of the curriculum that we are actually teaching, in terms of the staff and who they are and how they operate, as well as in terms of the empowerment and validation and support. Young people have always been the engine and the driving force for social change in our society.

In the school district, we are taking steps in this regard and we are trying to make -- construct a district which is pro-active and friendly and open to and supportive of young people as they deal with the issues of their identity.

We will have different speakers from the district to speak more implicitly about the range of programs that we're actually doing in terms of counselling efforts that are actually going on, the education efforts that are going on. The speakers that follow me will do some of those pieces.

Let me just touch on a couple of parts. I do want to commend the health programs that we have been doing. Much of the work -- much work was begun from the
leadership of Tom Ammiano when he was on the school board in terms of really being able to put in place actual counselling at the district to be able to move in that regard, opening the district up to community speakers to be supportive of organizations such as CUAV, to be able to share with the district in that regard, as Martha mentioned, the naming of the Harvey Milk School, and that we are actually using Deborah (phonetic spelling) Elementary School as an educational piece for all the teachers, inviting them to be able to see how we can deal with these issues. So that's some of the stuff that we're actually taking.

And I guess the last thing that I want to close on is that I really want to reiterate this piece that to me this is not just an issue of either political correctness or policy at this time, per se. This really is an issue of morality and the definition of our society, and are we going to be inclusive and supportive of all people, but particularly when it comes to youth and all young people, to really not be able to have any institutional barriers for their inclusion.

I think that all of us need to band together and actually form a coalition and raise our voices to make a priority to change our institutions, and while we did name -- rename the school after Harvey Milk and we have
made a number of steps in the school district, none of it has been without oposition, quite frankly. None of it has been easy.

I think that there is still a degree of insecurity and a degree of apprehension about making and supporting these types of changes. We need to reiterate it ourselves.

That's why I again want to commend this Commission for really having the courage to put these issues on the agenda. It's only through talking about them and continuing to work through the difficult pieces will we create the comfort level within which we can construct the institutional pieces that will validate our youth of all backgrounds. Thank you all.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Commissioner Salazar-Hobson, did you have a question?

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSON: Yes.

Mr. Phillips, given your well-known leadership in this area and being president of the school board, do you have a wish list of what you would like to see, other than what is being presented your representatives this evening, in terms of setting the goal very high on this issue?

MR. PHILLIPS: A wish list. How long do I have?
I really think that -- I really believe that the issues are actually attitudinal, fundamentally, and that's why I think that it's more of a question of how do you change the culture to be able to not to have so much visceral fear and reaction to doing things such as constructive and responsible sex education in the schools.

We have such a battle.

I guess that would be the main pieces, working together to educate the public about what we actually should be doing so there is not the level of fear and reaction, and with talk radio and the columns in the newspaper that are really attacking the efforts that we are making to move in this regard.

And that, I think, is one of the biggest problems that we face, whether there is such a thing as sex ed, or naming the school, you get a lot of reaction based on fear. I think that if we can change that in terms of educating the public that would make a lot of implementation pieces much more smooth.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Commissioner Jaicks?

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: On some of the Youth and Education Committees -- on our youth and education committee, we have found that the programs are there for the schools but the implementation is very uneven.

And I was wondering whether or not or -- why you
think that is so. Why, for instance, one young person tonight spoke about how Lowell was doing it, or was it Washington High School, and others where there is absolutely none there. And you mentioned CUAV. And I think that CUAV, when they testified before us, indicated that they got into 33 classrooms last year, 33 out of I don't know how many classrooms you have. So, you get the feeling that it really isn't reaching the students.

Do you have any comments on that?

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes. I think the implementation, really in any effort in the district is a major challenge. We can pass all the policies that we want, but if they don't translate down, then it's not going to actually occur.

What I am hopeful of in terms of we are actually bringing in, we have hired about 500 new teachers, who I think generally tend to be younger and supportive, have more familiarity with these types of issues, so that I think that that issue would be helpful in that regard.

But fundamentally, I do think that when it gets to implementation it's a question of staff developing professional development, people who may not have grown up or may not have been exposed to these issues and these realities that will be able to provide some support for them to be able to construct ways to discuss them in the
classroom.

So, I'm delighted that we are actually going to be able to use films in elementary as a staff development piece, and integrate it into our ongoing teacher training efforts, so if this is part of their regular work, will come to see this, be able to discuss it, and get ideas around how to actually do it. So, that's a part of it.

We also have to create, I think, a critical mass of people who know how to do it, and then they can be able to share that with other people. But it's part of the overall staff of professional development which is an issue in regards to this realm but also in terms of basic instructional pieces. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Now, I'd like to introduce JDr. Joyce Petro, speaking on behalf of Superintendent Rojas.

JOYCE PETRO

MS. PETRO: I'm Joyce Petro, supervisor of school health programs. And I'm speaking on behalf of Dr. Rojas, the superintendent of schools.

I'm proud to say that the San Francisco Unified School District is a leader in providing support services for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth.

Our six-year program, the first comprehensive program in the country is committed to recognizing and
supporting the unique needs of these youths as well as developing programs to support young people living in gay and lesbian families.

Unlike most schools districts across the country, when San Francisco Unified talks about diversity, that discussion extends far beyond ethnic and cultural differences.

Gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender youths comprise a portion of our student population who have very special needs. As confirmed by national statistics, these youths are at highest risk for low self-esteem, substance abuse, suicide and other health risks.

Directly or indirectly, they often feel excluded in the classroom and in school communities by virtue of their sexual identity.

To meet the complex needs of these young people, San Francisco Unified School District has developed and implemented a comprehensive approach which begins with developmentally appropriate lessons within a District-adopted health education curriculum, addressing family diversity, name calling, homophobia, and sexual harassment.

In every middle and high school, the health education curriculum supported by designated staff to serve as safe adults for young people questioning their
sexual identity or addressing the challenges they face in the school setting.

The district provides licensed counsellors available to all youths questioning their sexuality, as well as families of sexual minority youths.

In some high schools, support groups, student support groups offer an opportunity for youth to discuss issues, concerns and fears.

San Francisco Unified School District and Commission is to provide each student with equal opportunity to succeed.

Gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender youth are a part of our student population. Thus, we are committed and will continue to be committed to providing programs and services that support their intellectual growth, creativity, cultural and linguistic sensitivity and physical and mental health.

We will continue to expand our efforts to support our goal of treating all individuals with respect and dignity and to challenge the fear and misunderstanding fostered by others. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: If you can just stay up there for a second. We have a few questions

Commissioner Youn Chey, first.

COMMISSIONER CHEY: Hello. This is great that
San Francisco Unified School District has such a sensitivity and developed some programs.

I am concerned about those large numbers of limited English proficient youths. I know that there are minority youths who do not have access to counsellors who understand them.

Still, there is a shortage of bilingual counsellors. And I'm concerned about that. I think there were some youths who have already spoken about this problem. Are you handling that area, as well?

MS. PETRO: Well, that's quite a challenge with all of our youth and all of our families in San Francisco are the bilingual students and their families.

We are working with the counsellors in all the middle schools and high schools. And, in fact, we have a four-hour training planned with them in November to begin looking at sex education, the issue of sexual identity, sexual harassment, and so forth.

We are also meeting with groups of counsellors in relation to the policies that we have. And I think part of the questions that were asked previously to this in relation to how do we get implementation of these programs across the board? I think in the six years that this program has been in place, we have seen the critical mass grow.
And we are getting dedicated and committed staff at all of our schools, small as they may be, that are beginning to address these issues.

So, our challenge is still ahead of us. We are working much closer with the bilingual department. We are getting many of our materials translated into Spanish and Cantonese, as a start. And we will be, as part of the counselling cadre, be working with those bilingual counsellors, those that we have.

COMMISSIONER CHEY: I would like to suggest, you know, there are many community-based organizations. I'm particularly concerned about the lack of any Korean bilingual counsellors. And when they go and speak about the problems, the school district sends them to Chinese counsellors. Koreans do not understand Chinese. I mean, let alone in English it is difficult.

So, I think we are available at community-based organizations and willing to translate any material you might have. It's not just the Cantonese and Spanish living in San Francisco.

MS. PETRO: Right. And I appreciate your offer. We will take you up on that.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Okay. We have a round of commissioners here, if you can hang on.

Commissioners, if you can keep the question
short so we can keep the movement of this thing going.

Commissioner Saliba-Malouf, please.

COMMISSIONER SALIBA-MALOUF: I want to ask you
what type of training do you require or mandate teacher in
schools that are professionals to undertake sensitivity
training around this issue?

MS. PETRO: We have a mandated curriculum that
includes the lessons that I spoke of. The professional
development sessions that are held after school hours
based on policy are not mandated. However, we do
participate in a district-wide professional development
days, and all staff are on site.

So, we have a forum to meet with all staff on
those particular seven days during the school year, and
then additional time to do additional training with staff
outside of hours. We do pay stipends for them to come, so
that is an additional incentive.

But when you think about the number of the
teachers in San Francisco, we have our work cut out for us
in trying to reach them through a professional development
system. We need more help.

COMMISSIONER SALIBA-MALOUF: Just one small
follow-up. What percent of the teachers do you think
participate, just if you can --

MS. PETRO: I really couldn't estimate at this
point.

We focus primarily, first, on the teachers that are delivering our health education curriculum. So every student now in elementary school, as a board policy that was passed in August, will receive 20 classes related to health education, which includes these lessons at every level, elementary level, 30 classes at the middle school, sixth, seventh and eighth grade and 45 at the high school level.

So, we now have, based on that board policy, a mandated number of hours per year, which we never had before.

Now, we can go and train the teachers because it's a policy that they have put in place. So we have more opportunity and more -- I can't think of the right word. But behind us is the policy to get more teachers to come to those trainings.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Commissioner Martinez.

COMMISSIONER MARTINEZ: It's a comment and also it's a question. And it's also directed to Mr. Phillips, as well as to yourself.

We see that San Francisco leads in addressing the concerns of our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender queer and questioning youth, but we have also heard from the youth themselves that it's not enough. That's kind of
the worry that I have. And that's the comment.

But at the same time I'm wondering if the school district will open the doors to the youth that took the time today and have great ideas, some demands, very simple ones, I might add, but that would help a whole lot, and indeed part of this -- of the district, is probably training, probably addressing the issue. And if so, how can they reach you or Mr. Phillips that are here present today?

MS. PETRO: It's a multi-part question.

Actually, the youth that I heard speak had a tremendously powerful message. And I think any way that we can use the youth to work with youth in the schools will enhance our program.

There are a variety of education codes from the California State Board of Education that limit some of our ability to just open our doors in that way.

However, we are beginning to work through some procedures and policies that community members -- additional community agencies, youth in the community can work through an awareness training of the procedures and policies that occur and so forth, to increase the number of the young people and people that come up with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth.

So, that is one of the things from this
testimony that we will explore.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Commissioner

Salazar-Hobson.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSON: Doctor, if you could comment on what is the amount of current funding made available for these types of services, whether you consider it enough.

In addition, despite San Francisco being -- the San Francisco School District being one of the leaders in the country on this issue, Mr. Phillips mentioned removing institutional barriers. I also come from a language minority community. You are talking about a six-year project, and you're now starting translations.

I want to know why those kinds of delays take place. And in addition, you heard the disparity between one very good example, Washington, and then surprisingly, a failed example at Lowell, a prestigious school.

How can you explain that disparity? And imagine what it's also like when you add on to that a language barrier?

MR. JOYCE: The funding, first.

We have a half-time, one-sixth -- about a 1.2 percent position out of our office whose primary focus is related to these issues, not only development of curriculum but it's in-service training, working with
administrators, working directly with some youths in schools.

The individuals that are assigned in each of the middle schools and high schools are paid a stipend through the year to work with us. The money is never adequate for any of our youth.

We've lost a lot of funding from a variety of sources. Most of the programs coming in through our programs department are actually funded by the federal and state soft money. So, that is an issue for all of us.

Again, categorical funding is very, very hard. We have been challenged as to not being able to use, for example, Safe and Drug-Free Schools money, which doesn't make sense to me, but we've been challenged that we, at the federal level, do not use Safe and Drug-Free Schools money to support a program, as they would say, "like this."

So it has been difficult, with the controversy that we face, as we try to move these programs forward, which, in fact, is probably why it's moving slower than we would like it to move.

The disparity, in many cases sometimes is in relation to the fear and misunderstanding by the staff themselves of the schools, which is why it's so critical.

We believe that any program, any good program
has to have the support of the administrators, which is why this year our primary focus is working with the school administrators, because if the school administrator is supporting the program, that program will happen.

You have the language and diversity issues and not being able to meet them. I think that we have to look for other ways to get those translations done other than internally because our staff are far extended to be able to translate all these materials.

So with those things in mind, I think that we will access what is out there in the community to try and meet that need.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: I'm sorry. One more question.

It's just a quick comment. We really do appreciate your extra time that you're spending here, so thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: This is just a comment. I understand what you said about funding, but as a young person hearing someone coming in at 1.2 percent, it's really inadequate to address the needs of the entire San Francisco Unified School District. This is more than just a ploy because people are actually dying over this.

Could you please relay this back to
Superintendent Rojas.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to welcome Larry Alegre, Co-Chair of Gay and Lesbian United Educators.

LARRY ALEGRE

MR. ALEGRE: Hello, my name is Larry Alegre. I don't know if I have to spell my name. Everybody else seemed to.

Hello, everyone, I don't like to turn my back to half the audience.

Thank you for having this commission today.

I am a member of BANGLE, Bay Area Network of Gay and Lesbian Educators, and of GLUE. I'm a co-chair of GLUE, which is Gay and Lesbian United Educators through the union. And I've been a teacher in the San Francisco Unified School District for 12 years.

I recently became an administrator at an elementary school called Cesar Chavez Elementary School. I came out to the school -- to my school, which is an elementary school a couple of years ago with the help of Tim Kurbo (phonetic spelling), who is no longer living, who was Tom Ammiano's former lover.

And I want to convey that attitudes are formed in elementary school and that we need to focus on elementary schools. That's where it started. That is
where the attitudes start.

My recommendations with the experience that I've had as a bilingual teacher in this district for 12 years and now I'm going to be an administrator, are that we have more aggressive curriculum training for teachers at all levels, especially elementary school. And these need to be mandated.

More continued, mandated sensitivity training for teachers and administrators, and also parents. We need more gay and lesbian resource people for the district -- 1.2 and we have the other ones. We need more.

I have spoken to the superintendent about this also. We do not have anyone to represent purely the elementary schools, which is --

(The sound of the beep.)

Does that mean I have one more minute or -- oh, my God. Okay.

We have 76 elementary schools, and there is not one resource teacher just for the elementary schools. And that is where it all starts. That is why I came tonight. Elementary school is where the attitudes are formed.

Imagine if the president signed a bill that said Latinos or Chinese or African-Americans could not get married. This is what happened a few days ago.

Let's do something right. Let's start at the
beginning. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Let me just explain administratively that when that buzzer goes off that means that you have had your two minutes. If people haven't quite finished their written comments and have written comments, please feel free to provide that testimony. And we will get that into the record.

Also, if you have additional comments that you want to get into the record later, you will have that opportunity. So I don't want people to feel too frustrated with the two minutes, but we have so many speakers this evening that we want to make sure we have a chance to hear from all of them.

So, we'll move on.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Kevin Gogin, from the San Francisco Unified School District, Director of Support Services for Sexual Minority Youth.

KEVIN GOGIN

MR. GOGIN: I am Kevin Gogin, Director of Support Services for Sexual Minority Youth of the San Francisco Unified School District. And with me is Crystal Jang, the Assistant Director of Support Services.

And in the interest of our time, we were each given one minute. She gave me hers. So I'm speaking for us both.
Support services is in its seventh year. The past six years have brought incredible changes since that first student phoned requesting assistance.

At present, there is a designated gay, lesbian, sensitive adult position identified at each of the 22 middle schools and in each of the 20 high schools.

The staff will receive ongoing training and work to deliver all health-related services, implement the District anti-slur policy, assure that the District-approved curriculum for elementary, middle and high schools is being taught, post signs and posters, that are printed in five languages and be available to self-identified queer youth and their families. All that and teach class.

Last year, all of the middle school principals received training. And this year all 76 elementary principals will receive an in-service.

Next Tuesday, over 250 teachers, administrators and counsellors will attend a three-hour in-service which will include a screening of the film, "It's Elementary," talking about gay issues in school.

We consider this good news. Our success. We have a program that is serving as a model for the rest of the nation. Daily we respond to national and international requests regarding how we have been able to
integrate the program that addresses the needs of queer youth into school settings.

But there is some bad news here, as well. For starters, we are on the defensive from right wing political officials and groups daily who wish to deny basic rights to queer youth.

Also, while we have more students expressing the feeling of safety while on school sites than ever before, it really is no easier today for these young people to claim their sexual orientation publicly than it was for me to come out as a high school student in San Francisco 25 years ago.

Stereotypes run deep. So does discrimination against anyone who may be perceived to be gay, lesbian, and bisexual or transgender.

And that is why Crystal and I, with the support of the school board and the district administration, are adamant that we have more work to do. We are committed to making schools safe for our queer youth, but we are also committed to the belief that part of the educational process for all of our students must include the realization that all persons, including the gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender student sitting across from me deserve the same respect and rights as any other student in our school. Thank you.
CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Commissioner Jaicks, did you have a question?

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: Is there any penalty for lack of implementation of the school programs for any teacher that may -- you always find programs that are coming down and there are some of them homophobic teachers and some of them --

MR. GOGIN: Well, we would not have one of the homophobic teachers as one of our designated adults.

So, adults -- over the past six years one of the things we have done is collect a cadre of adults who are dedicated to being sure that the queer students are safe on-site and we are working to that end.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: The teachers that don't carry out -- the unevenness that we hear, that don't carry out the programs. Are they -- how do you hold them accountable?

MR. GOGIN: Well, that is a challenge that we face. And I don't have a clear answer for you on that.

We go to site administrators. On occasion, we will confront the teacher directly. If it's something that has happened, for instance, in a classroom setting, but that's all we can do.

The key is mandated training, that we feel -- and we are working toward that. We think we've made great
strides in that progress, but we don't have mandated
training for every teacher in the District.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: But there is no --

The school has no policy towards the teacher
that doesn't carry out the instruction?

MR. GOGIN: I can't answer that question.

You're going to have to talk to somebody from the Union or
an administrator.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: One more question.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSOON: Some of your
efforts are to be highly commended. But if you listen to
the testimony by the youth today, there was only one youth
who mentioned that they felt safe in their school
environment.

In addition, there was another young person who
indicated that one of the liaisons or sensitive person or
whatever you would call them because they could barely say
the word homosexual in a discussion.

And I'm wondering, what you need to accelerate
your program and what we could do to help that?

MS. JANG: When you ask us for a wish list, we
would wish that it is a mandated policy, that all
administrators, including the Board of Education, be
trained. We ask that all principals, vice principals,
counsellors and teachers in this district be trained.
We ask that we have more staff. We ask that we have a translation -- that we have access to translators, a translation where we don't have to beg our friends, to beg the teacher next door who is teaching five classes to translate my materials.

We work with communities, just to answer your questions about how we service students from the diverse communities with language issues. We do that through our friends from community-based organizations -- Asian AIDS project. We try to work with them very closely. And they have always been very generous in their time.

However, we need that to be instituted within our own system. The young people have a right to have that. So we ask that you help us do that.

MR. GOGIN: And there is something else that we need. One of the things that is lacking in our schools are visuals that respect the diversity and show the diversity of diverse family structures, gay, lesbian, bisexual transgender people. We need books, posters.

We don't have the money to buy those things. There is no money, and to go fundraising, to go buy books, which we call our throw-away books because we give them to teachers to put in classes so that they can disappear, so students can get them without checking them out of the library. People don't want to grant -- grantors just
don't want to fund those kinds of gifts.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Quickly, just two quick questions.

One, are you guys the 1.2 FTE that we're hearing about?

MS. JANG: We are.

MR. GOGIN: I guess.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Question number two, honestly, how many support staff persons would you say you would need to provide adequate services for the entire SFUSD?

MR. GOGIN: I want to go back to something that Mr. Phillips said. We are talking about changing attitudes. We could send out an army of 5,000, and it might not be adequate.

I think what is more important is that we continue to work, and as Larry had said, we are actually expanding into the elementary schools this year, that we continue to work and to get more and more dedicated teachers who are already interested and empower them to do the work that they have been trained to do on sites.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I agree, but 1.2 compared to the ratio of students. My math is not that bad.

MR. GOGIN: Also, just so that you know, we do
have a resource guide that has most of the curriculum. It has been Board approved, as well as the 10-minute video that we have given to the commission members in the past.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSON: Just one comment.

With regard to the -- in terms of the translation services, being very active in the translation community, I just had a script translated in two days for a very modest sum.

I can't understand why the school district would allow that kind of barrier to exist when there is an overflow of professional services here in the City, and the cost of not getting those things done on a timely basis is the fact that many of us will be excluded from any of the good work that you're doing.

MR. GOGIN: I do want to state that our lessons have been translated and our forms are out of our office, but there is more that we could be translating.

There's other materials that we could make accessible to students that are not translated. So you're right.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to welcome Tom Henning, a teacher with San Francisco Unified School District.

TOM HENNING

MR. HENNING: Good evening and thank you.
Can you hear me?

My name is Tom Henning. I'm a teacher at Thurgood Marshall Academic High School in the Bay View. And I'm also a mentor and a board member with the LYFE program.

And I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak.

Every school in this district has a wellspring of support for students that can be found in its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teachers.

Unfortunately this abundant resource has hardly been tapped. There are two intertwined reasons: Parents who are ignorant and scared about the homosexuality, and a school district that is unwilling to educate them while resisting their prejudices.

Until these two demons are exorcised, all the sensitivity trainings, awareness weeks, and pride celebrations are of little use.

Until the situation is resolved, queer teachers cannot help queer kids. On several occasions, parents have called our school demanding to know if their child is involved in our gay straight alliance.

In other schools, celebrations of queer pride and queer history have been muted because, quote, parents are complaining.
More than one student has been forbidden from taking part in any after-school group, to keep them out of our group, in particular. Their parents hope to protect them, presumably, from the corrupting influences of queer teachers.

That a school to aid and abet such attitudes is unprofessional as well as and contrary to the best interests of the child.

Dozens of psycholocal studies and the experiences of thousands of queer people have shown that mistreating or ignoring a child with homosexual desires will not bring forth heterosexual desires but would simply yield an unhappy, isolated homosexual or bisexual adult.

The school district can no longer sit idly by while homophobic parents continue to intimidate school administrators and teachers, all the while saying, our district doesn't discriminate and we value diversity.

Indeed, the school district is morally bound to act on what it knows about sexual identity rather than acting on what others fear.

To be sure, there are many homophobic administrators for whom parental concern is simply a shield for their own anxieties. These persons must be dealt with.

At Marshall, I was hired with the word gay all
over my resume and have been consistently supported by the
administrators at my site, Sam Butcher and Marian Sakey
(phonetic spelling).

I have thus been able to mentor students
directly and know that I have served dozens of others who
do not yet have the courage to come forward.

It's my hope the City will soon implement both
of the following reforms.

Number one, school administrators, schools
themselves, school sites, administrators and teachers are
now evaluated annually on a multitude of criterion. Open
and active support of gay, lesbian, bisexual and
transgender staff and students should be one of those
criteria on which these people in the schools are
evaluated.

Second, number two, parents of middle and high
schools should be regularly taught -- parents of middle
and high school students, I'm sorry, should be regularly
taught about the facts of homosexuality.

This is the one area of child development that
heterosexual parents are least informed about, often with
tragic consequences. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to call Meyla
Rewin, a Health Resource Specialist at SFUSD.

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MEYLA REWIN

MS. REWIN: Hello, my name is Meyla Rewin. I'm a health education and resource teacher, school health programs department, San Francisco Unified School District.

Adolescence is a time of conflict. Traditional health education may be limited in its ability to meet the diverse needs of youth today.

As a health education teacher, I have taught at the middle and high school levels. Students need to feel comfortable and safe at school.

It is necessary for teachers to teach students the importance of accepting all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation.

As a teacher, I was surprised how many students called each other names such as fag, dyke, fairy, while running down the halls at school or in the yard.

Although an anti-slur policy exists in the district, often staff do not enforce the policy.

I have discussed this problem with many teachers. As the awareness of the policy increases, more staff are trying to implement it at the sites.

As a resource teacher, I have participated in teacher workshops encouraging teachers to implement the health education lessons about name calling, stereotyping
and family diversity.

As a teacher's awareness increases about the needs of sexual minority youth and they become more familiar with the available curricula, they are more likely to teach the material.

I also work with the health and school teams at the middle school level, which includes the health liaison, positive alternatives coordinator, and gay, lesbian site sensitive adult.

As a team, the teachers work together to implement school-wide activities. This team approach provides the mechanism for including the concerns of sexual minority youth when planning events at the school site.

Theater is also used as a method of teaching about issues affecting sexual minority youth.

Last year, 1,014 middle school students and 668 parents, care givers, attended team issues night events, an evening where teens and their parents, care givers, view a theater show and then participate in a post-performance discussion.

This event serves as a vehicle for increasing knowledge and encouraging communication about health issues affecting teens in San Francisco.

As an educator and ally of sexual minority
youth, I strongly suggest we work together to increase the knowledge of that issue pertaining to sexual minority youth and encourage all teachers and staff to make a school a safe place for all students.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to welcome Ede Imeri, member of PFLAG.

EDE IMERI

MS. IMERI: Good evening. My name is Ede Imeri, and I am the mother of a gay teenager.

We heard all of these kids talking tonight, and we are all aware of the gay teen suicide rate. Well, my son almost became one of those statistics -- excuse me. It happened four years ago, but every time I say it, I get very, very emotional.

I turned to his school for support. And at that school I did meet individual teachers and a counsellor who seemed aware of the needs of gay youth.

The dean of the students, however, showed no compassion. He suggested that perhaps I should transfer my son to another school. Obviously, the reputation of his school was a lot more important than the well-being of one gay kid.

I know that each of our schools does have its designated gay sensitive advisors. We have heard about that. And this is a good thing, but it is not enough.
The whole administration has to be informed. They have to be educated so that a safe environment is created for all kids.

My kid went to that school that somebody said they felt so safe in. He was mugged twice. That was the school he transferred to.

Our educators need to be educated. It has to be mandatory. It can't be, "Well, I think I'll go to that meeting."

The isolation, depression and fear that my son lived with can be eliminated. And those statistics that we hear about? They can be reduced. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Commissioner Salazar-Hobson has a question.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSON: Ms. Imeri, the previous speaker, Ms. Rewin, stated essentially conceded that she encountered situations where the staff didn't enforce the anti-slur policy.

To what level of responsibility do you assign, if they are to enforce such a policy, to youth who choose to consider suicide as an option, or to give up hope?

MS.IMERI: Well, in my opinion, my never to be humble opinion, each teacher has an obligation when they sign that contract to keep -- to educate our kids and to keep that school safe. They have an obligation. They
have an obligation to my gay child, as well as to my five straight children.

What can I say? It has to be done.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Sheila Ortiz, member of PFLAG.

SHEILA ORTIZ

MS. ORTIZ: My name is Sheila Ortiz. I am the mother of three children who have been educated in the San Francisco public schools.

I have worked in their schools 15 years ago as a paraprofessional and up until last year as a volunteer.

My youngest just graduated from high school this past June. She was in her sophomore year of high school when she tearfully told me she's a lesbian.

Scarlet was so afraid that she waited a year from the time that she had realized what had set her apart from her friends. She always knew that she had been different, but she couldn't put it into words what that difference was.

My reaction to her announcement was positive and encouraging. I looked up the local chapter of parent and friends of lesbians and gays, because I needed to know how to lend my support.

You might wonder how I didn't know Scarlet is a lesbian. I think I knew but not consciously. She's
different, and she never went along with the gender roles of her sex. I thought she was just a tomboy and would grow out of it someday.

Fortunately, my daughter has a supportive circle of friends and family. She's a lucky child. My hope is that she continues to be the proud, happy person she is.

There are many children in school today who do not have the kind of support my daughter has. There is no one for them to turn to.

I think that the dropout rate, and even worse, the suicide rate for lesbian, gay, transgender and bixesual youth is significantly higher than for the rest of our young.

The questions -- suggestions I have are to bring back and enhance the counselling and other programs which have been severely cut. Art, music and sports are ways in which youth can express themselves and feel a part of school, that might not allow them to otherwise. As counsellors and teachers have far too many students to help, only the most severely troubled get attention and by then it may be too late.

Awareness of and sensitivity to differences must be an element of all school staff. My daughter did not expect a positive reaction from her teacher. She was used to the side looks and questioning glares of many faculty.
When she was treated with equality by her teacher, she responded with openness, honesty and hard work, which I wish all students could feel as a part of San Francisco public education.

Each of my children is fortunate to have grown up in San Francisco. Scarlet is especially lucky to have the support of friends and family.

I only wish that all San Francisco youth could find this support in order to reach their full potential and not feel, as Scarlet did for a brief time, that no one understood and there was no hope. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

Next, Camomile de Quelquechose, from the Lesbian and Gay Parents Association.

CAMOMILE DE QUELQUECHOSE

MR. DE QUELQUECHOSE: Good evening, and thank you for inviting me.

My name is Camomile De Quelquechose. I am a father of a five-year-old daughter who just started kindergarten at Buena Vista East Elementary. And I'm representing the Lesbian and Gay Parents Association.

I wrote a very polite speech, which I am not going to read because I've been sitting here for hours listening to testimony from young people whose lives have been nearly ruined by homophobia. And I'm too angry to
read a polite speech.

I have memories going back to third grade. And if my memory were a little better, I would probably have memories going back further than that.

Kids learn homophobia. They are not born homophobic. They are taught homophobia. They are taught homophobia in the San Francisco public schools, as well as every other school anywhere in the world.

They are taught it because kids call each other faggot, and teachers do nothing. They're taught it because there are no, or very few now, folks in the classroom that say anything, especially anything positive about gay and lesbian people, transgender people, bisexual people. I'm not going to do the whole list every time. I've only got two minutes. Okay.

They are taught it when people talk about athletes, about artists, about musicians, about scientists, who happen to be lesbian or gay, but the fact that they are lesbian or gay is never mentioned.

All those things teach homophobia. There is a debate in our school about whether or not lesbian and gay, those words, can be said. I'm tired of that debate. I do not think there should be a debate about whether my daughter can talk about her family.

But there are parents in those schools who
believe that every time that discussion happens in a classroom, they should send home permission slips first. And all the parents who are too uptight to hear about that should take their precious children out of the classroom so they don't have to hear those horrible words.

What does that do to those children in that classroom? It tells them that being gay, being a lesbian, being transgender is a horrible thing that you should never want, and if you even think that you might be one of those people, perhaps the best thing for you to do is crawl in a hole and die.

In one of our workshops, I was told the story by a woman whose son had a boy -- had a friend, a young son, very best friends, another boy. I'm sorry I'm going to take a little bit of extra time here.

The two kids were really close and they stopped playing together. And she asked her son, why? And the son said because we were being teased for being gay. They're a little too close.

Boys aren't supposed to be close to each other. Girls aren't supposed to be close to each other. That's a bad thing.

She wanted to confront the school. She wanted to approach the administrators and say, what can we do about this problem?
She talked to the other boy's parent. What did she do? She pulled her kid out of that school. And that relationship between those two boys in a situation in which nobody was gay was destroyed by homophobia.

Homophobia affects every single human being. It affects the choices we can make. It affects the relationships that are approved and the ones that are disapproved.

And I am tired of it. We have been doing workshops in the elementary schools for two years. We've produced a video. We have a training. It's an effective training.

We get absolutely no official support for that. We do it on a volunteer basis. There is no program that says -- that welcomes us into the schools. And I don't mean to criticize Kevin and Crystal. I think they're doing a wonderful job. That is not my point.

My point is: Here is a group of parents that want to be active in the school doing the very trainings that are absolutely necessary for every single teacher, administrator and staff person.

Nobody knocks on our door. In fact, we have to go calling individual principals. Some of them welcome us. Some of them never bother calling back.

These trainings must be mandated. Every
teacher, administrator and staff person must learn not to
be homophobic and how not to be homophobic.

    Thank you.

    I forgot one thing. I have here a copy of our
video and a transcript of it, which I would like to submit
into evidence.

    CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Okay. Thank you very
much.

    Commissioner Jaicks, do you have a quick
question?

    COMMISSIONER JAICKS: Would you also agree that
the children learn this in many of the churches, this
homophobia?

    MR. DE QUELQUECHOSE: Absolutely. They learn
it in churches. They learn it in homes. They learn it
everywhere. There are very few places they don't learn
it. They learn it in movies. They learn it on T.V. They
learn it from books. It's universal.

    COMMISSIONER MARSHALL: One quick question.
Why can't you coordinate your activities with Kevin?

    MR. DE QUELQUECHOSE: We have a cooperative
relationship with Kevin. The point that I'm making is
there is no official program in the school district or the
health department that invites us in to do these
trainings.
We have to go do it on our own. We don't get paid to do this. We went out and got grant money to pay ourselves stipends to do this.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to welcome Marcus Arana, Speakers Bureau Coordinator of Community United Against Violence.

MARCUS ARANA

MR. ARANA: There's not a whole lot that I can say that hasn't been said.

THE REPORTER: Could you put your name on the record.

MR. ARANA: My name is Marcus D'Maria Arana. I'm the coordinator for the Speakers Bureau, Community United Against Violence.

I don't think that I need to explain to you who CUAV is or what we do, but we do go into the schools to talk about heterosexism and to demystify homosexuality, and the young people are going to benefit from this education when they learn that HIV is not a gay disease but a human one.

Young people are going to benefit when they learn how to make decisions regarding their own bodies and their own lives. And it's that decision-making process that will determine whether or not they go out and attack
somebody they perceive to be queer or whether or not they could be an ally to someone who is under attack.

Well, what youths say about the Speakers Bureau speaks volumes about how important these presentations are.

Did this presentation change the way you feel about lesbians and gays? "Yes. It made me feel more comfortable."

"Yes. I think that whatever they do, they should have the right to do it and it's sad they can't get married just because the city thinks it isn't right."

"It shouldn't be up to them because they're not the ones that are going through the marriage or staying with the partner."

"We are all humans, so we should respect each other."

What did you like most about the presentation? "They were very fun. And they do the same things we do when having fun."

In short, they saw us as human beings.

Now, of course, not all of the responses are as uplifting. Rarely we do receive responses like, "Fuck you, faggots," or "Fuck you, fairies."

One response constantly, daily motivates me to combat heterosexism.
Did this presentation change how you feel about lesbian and gays? "No. Because if any gay ever came up to me and asked me something, I will hit him."

This is one reason why I do what I do, and that's to teach tolerance.

And the other reason is that more than one-third of all youth suicides are queer and questioning youth. That is 33 percent or better.

Over the last two weeks, I personally have crisis counselled two youths who were highly suicidal. Both had tried to hurt themselves. Both had tried to kill themselves rather than live with the pressure of being queer.

When I asked them, were they upset about being queer? No. They were fine with being queer. It was how they were treated by people around them.

You want to know why Washington is safer than Lowell? We were in nine classes last semester at Washington. We were in no classes at Lowell.

Do you want to know if there is enough people to help translate all of the information from the support services office? Yes, there are hundreds of volunteers. I had five of them approach me during this speech to tell me, "We will help translate." There are plenty of volunteers to work.
We want to know things like when is transgender going to be allowed to the list of speakers allowed in the schools.

I'm not here to attack anybody. I just want to ask just a couple of questions why.

If we are an approved group lesson plan of the school district's curriculum, then why did the principal at Burton School last semester tell a new teacher to stop the presentation because, quote, "CUAV," was not allowed to be there."

If we are approved for grades 6 through 12, then, why are we not speaking to sixth and seventh graders?

If the city funds programs like CUAV, then why are not all life health science teachers at every middle and high school utilizing our speakers?

There are 41 middle and high schools listed in the phone book. We spoke to 14 schools last semester. My question is why cannot San Francisco make the jobs at the support services for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender and questioning youth, those positions full time so these problems can be resolved?

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: That concludes our section on youth in the schools. And I want to thank all the speakers who spoke during that section.
Now, we are going move into the section on family, housing and shelter. The first service provider is Thomas Rutherford, who is a child welfare supervisor, with the San Francisco Department of Human Services. Welcome.

THOMAS RUTHERFORD

MR. RUTHERFORD: Thank you very much for having me here this evening to talk on this issue.

Good evening, Commissioners. I am Thomas Rutherford, the child welfare supervisor of a long-term placement team unit at the San Francisco Department of Human Services.

I'm here tonight to speak a little bit about what the department is doing to deal with the population of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.

The San Francisco Department of Human Services recently formed a specialized team unit designed to deal with the myriad of issues the teens face as they prepare for emancipation from the foster care system.

As part of the specialized teen unit -- excuse me -- a part of the specialized teen unit is devoted to dealing with the homeless teen population of San Francisco.

We have found that some of the children and
youth report that part of the reason, and in some cases
the entire reason, that they are homeless or in their
homeless situation is the fact that they are lesbian, gay,
bisexual, transgender and/or questioning their own sexual
identity.

Unfortunately, homeless youth are ripe for
exploitation as they struggle to make it on their own. I
would like to pose a few thought-provoking questions this
evening.

Who are those children and youth that we pass on
the streets late at night? They're our children.

Who are those children and youth that we pass in
the streets who are in need of food and a warm place to
sleep? Those are our children.

Who are those children and youth that we see on
the streets who appear to be lost and troubled? They're
our children.

Who are the children and the youth that we so
easily label as runaway or throw-away children? Those
are our children.

When we see children and youth in crisis, can we
gain any comfort in telling ourselves: That's not my
child. I don't think so.

It's time that we, as a city, begin caring and
reaching out to all of our children and all of our youth.
The San Francisco Department of Human Services
is committed to serving all children and youth, regardless
of their sexual orientation. We are recruiting gay and/or
gay sensitive foster parents.

We have established a specialized teen unit,
which I spoke about a minute ago, that deals with the
homeless youth population and lesbian, gay, bisexual,
transgender and questioning youth.

We are working in collaboration with the
Homeless Youth Network and other community agencies that
provide outreach to children and youth who are in crisis.

How do we address the problem? I’ve heard a lot
of answers tonight or at least suggestions, and some of
them sound like pretty good answers.

One of the ways that we can approach a problem
is flexibility and collaboration in all systems, including
medical care, housing, schools, and social service
agencies, both public and private is required if we are to
service the way they deserve to be serviced, lesbian, gay,
bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, and
especially if we want to prepare them to be productive and
happy adults.

The San Francisco Department of Human Services
has submitted a few recommendations for the Commissioners''
consideration. Thank you very much for your time.
COMMISSIONER JAICKS: Madam Chair, can I ask a question?

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: If you could come back to the microphone.

Commissioner Jaicks has a quick question.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: Are you in charge of the shelter, too? Do you deal with the shelters?

MR. RUTHERFORD: There are people here this evening who will be talking to you about the shelter system on the street.

I actually work with foster care children, children who --

In my unit, some of the children that have come into our system are children that are labelled runaways and throw-away children. And they're usually brought to us by the Homeless Youth Network here in the City.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: Do you work with some of the providers that are -- that have religious orientation, such as Catholic Charities or Episcopal Mission or that kind of thing?

MR. RUTHERFORD: Well, I'm sure the City has contracts with them --

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: They do, but I'm wondering if your department does that?

MR. RUTHERFORD: Our department also has
contracts with a lot of the agencies that you just mentioned. Yes.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: all right. And have you been assured all along that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youths are treated equally in those -- from those providers and the services?

For instance, does the transgender youth get equal access to all of the facilities that are available to homeless children?

MR. RUTHERFORD: Well, I think if that was the case we wouldn't be here tonight, most likely.

I'd like to say that I can't speak for all the programs that the departments or the City contracts with. I do know that, in our program, in our foster care program, we have children that fit all of the categories we've been mentioning this evening, yes.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I would like to welcome Evelyn Poates from -- child welfare worker, San Francisco Department of Human Services.

EVELYN POATES

MS. POATES: Hi, good evening, my name is Evelyn Poates. That is a real good guess. That's a little simkpler.

I work with Mr. Rutherford at the Department of
Human Services teen unit. I first began working with this population of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in 1979 at Huckleberry House.

At that time, we saw countless young people who had come to San Francisco from other parts of the country where they had been pushed out or rejected from their homes.

At that point there were very few services available to them. These children are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and substance abuse just to survive day to day.

What we consistently found when these young people first seek services is that they are often suffering serious depression, major self-esteem problems, other mental health issues, substance abuse problems, including serious addiction at times, and health problems of many sorts.

Sometimes they have life-threatening illnesses. They are at the highest risk of suicide of other teenagers. And they would be totally unable to function in any type of mainstream placement setting and, as we discussed, the traditional school settings, without a lot of support, unless they're miraculously transformed, which I haven't seen lately.

When the department began working with the
Homeless Youth Network in 1990 to provide some assistance to these young people, we recruited quite a few gay sensitive and lesbian, gay, bisexual foster homes to provide placement services to these young people.

Now, with the positive support of some of these role models to provide them caring homes and other assistance, many of these young people have stabilized incredibly well.

Many of them have achieved significant success by obtaining scholarships through -- very prestigious California universities. They are now role models themselves. We are extremely proud of their accomplishments.

Many of these young people have also been able to establish more positive relationships with their families as they have been able to work through some of these issues and stabilize their lives.

We need to continue to support services of this nature and the recruitment of gay and lesbian foster homes.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on this subject.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to call Cheryl Deaner, Director of Alternative Family Project.

/ / / / /
MS. DEANER: The Alternative Family Project is a non-profit family service agency for families of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender family members. We are located at Oak and Divisadero in San Francisco.

Alternative Family Project provides both the individual, couple, and family counselling for queer youth, at queer youth group and events.

Although it is common for most youths to have some amount of conflict with those that have raised them, for queer youth, these conflicts are made much worse when they're overshadowed by chronic stress of disapproval and condemnation merely because of their sexual or gender orientation. This stress often results in the youth leaving home prematurely.

Without a supportive introduction to the realities of the adult world, youth, even with the bravest of hearts and the best of intentions, are being set up to be incredibly vulnerable and often will fail.

A good counsellor can help change this. A counsellor is someone who listens, truly listens and provides a bridge to the adult world.

A good counsellor can enable a youth to defend themselves against both the present and the past forces that are debilitating them.
They can and do help the young people to save themselves from much unnecessary years of pain. We at the Alternative Family Project sincerely hope that more attention will be paid to the psychological well-being of our queer youth and not just physical health and shelter needs. Thanks.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I would like to invite Diane Manning, Associate Director of Program, Larkin Street Youth Center.

DIANE MANNING

MS. MANNING: Good evening. My name is Diane Manning. I'm with the Larkin Street Center. And I appreciate this opportunity to talk to you about young people in San Francisco who are in dire need of some support services from their community.

Larkin Street Youth Center works with homeless and run-away youth, and we offer a continuum of services to youth ages 12 to 23.

The services include emergency shelter, such as Diamond Youth shelter; outreach to young people that are out on the streets who are in need of services and don't even know that they exist.

We also have a collaborative effort with the Department of Public Health Special Programs for Youth, to provide medical care for these young people.
We have a collaborative effort with the San Francisco Unified School District to provide them with education. We also work very closely with the Department of Social Services and the teen unit that Tom talked extensively about.

These are all creative, flexible, and innovative ideas which have provided opportunities for young people to escape the exploitation that was also talked about by Tom, and I won't go through it again.

They're very much at risk. They are very much in need of care and of services. Most of the young people who leave home leave home because of things that are related to sexual abuse and physical abuse.

And homeless and runaway youth become further isolated out on the streets. Often, what happens with gay and lesbian youth, in addition. Is that they then become targets for discrimination, for hate crimes, not only in the street but in the community as a whole, and they often flee to San Francisco, thinking it will be a safer place for them. Unfortunately, I don't think they always find that to be true.

The problems at home and the reasons that they leave home usually do stem from family members, school officials and schoolmates. Even overall people in their community just don't understand and are not willing to
take the time to understand.

The discrimination and hate they face often leads to poor self-esteem, to mental health issues, to depression, to substance abuse problems, and suicide, as has also been talked about.

I believe that the biggest thing that young people need is an opportunity. The collaborations that we are involved with have provided young people with those opportunities, and they themselves have created a productive life for themselves and have made a difference not only in their own lives but in other people's lives.

We need to be aggressive and proactive in developing supportive and embracing programs for gay and lesbian youth in our schools here in San Francisco. That means educating young people, educating teachers, educating peers, and educating families.

The school district does a great job, but they are way understaffed. They are way underfunded. LYRIC is a similar situation. They do a wonderful job of providing education and social events for gay and lesbian youth, but it's still not enough. We need to be more proactive and aggressive.

Foster parents and families who need to take young people into their home because their families won't do it are also needed.
We have a program that we focus on providing young people in these circumstances with gay, sensitive foster homes.

I hope the Commission will continue to make San Francisco a safe place for gay and lesbian youth because they are our children. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much. I call Reverend Jim Mitulski, Pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church.

REVEREND JAMES MITULSKI

REV. MITULSKI: I'm Jim Mitulski. I'm happy to be with you here this evening as you address this very important issue. I think the best way I can alert you to one of the concerns that I see in my capacity as a pastor of a gay and lesbian church is to let you know that religion is one of the greatest menaces that lesbian and gay youth face right now.

It pains me as a Christian pastor to tell you this, but I want you to be aware of the extent to which religion in this city and across this country, because the children from across this country end up in this city when they run away, are being not only menaced but undermined in their self-esteem by religious forces. This happens in homes and in church schools, again, not only across the country, but in this city.
The effects that I see in my office, in my
curch, in this community is that gay and lesbian youth
from childhood are taught not only to not tolerate
themselves but to actively hate themselves. And it takes
years for these young people to overcome this kind of
stigmatization that is internalized, as well as reinforced
externally by religious figures.

Religion undermines gay and lesbian children in
their families. How many times I cannot tell you I have
talked to adolescents who say that if their parents find
out that they are gay or lesbian not only will they be
kicked out of their homes, they'll be kicked out of their
churches. And the pastors of their churches will support
their parents in this action. This happens in this city.

I have talked to parents of adolescents with HIV
and young adults who have said to me, why must I choose
between my church and my children, when they agonize over
whether or not they could be present to their children who
are ill in the dying process.

As I said, it pains me to tell you this, but I
think that religion is one of the greatest menaces. And I
have a particular concern, not only for students in public
schools but for students in religious schools in this
city, who are being taught to hate themselves in ways that
play out not only in adolescence but in young adulthood as
So, I encourage you to keep in mind the needs, not only of students in public schools but also students in church schools to make sure that they have access to safe places where they can process and overcome the debilitating effects of a religious upbringing.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to welcome Tony Noble, Health and Support Service Coordinator for Hospitality House.

TONY NOBLE

MR. NOBLE: Hello, I'm Tony Noble. And I'm speaking as the health and support services coordinator of Hospitality House Youth Program, which works with homeless and run-away youths in San Francisco, in addition to being a former run-away gay teenager here in San Francisco, myself, albeit some years ago.

Among the youth we work with at Hospitality House, many are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. While many of the needs of homeless youth are the same as any homeless youth regardless of sexual orientation, needing outreach services, nutritional food, emergency shelter, sheltered and transitional housing that leads to stable independent housing, job training and placement, continuing education, including GED preparation, substance abuse treatment; counselling and other mental health
services, including suicide prevention, HIV prevention education, including access to health clinics, queer youth need to have services that are not only sensitive to queer youth but are proactively and aggressively developed and promote a trusting and accepting environment for one's queerness and one's homelessness.

In addition to training staff on the psycho-social needs of queer youths and how to effectively deliver services and in addition to having magazines and posters with queer imagery and queer material in public spaces, such as waiting rooms and treatment offices, all agencies and organizations need to incorporate queer issues, subjects and concerns into all programming curriculum and treatments.

In substance abuse groups, for example, the impact of homophobia in youth should not be a special topic or designated for a special group of queer youth. It should be included in all group meetings, since queer youth may be present, whether they identify as such or not.

Thus, if a substance abuse group talks about family systems, the impact of non-accepting homophobic families and the subsequent impact on a youth should be presented in health groups and in questions or comments that reflect queers' concerns, which will enlighten the
that to happen. So, please feel free to do that.

    If you feel like you could just submit written
testimony and don't want to make comments tonight, that
would be fine, too. But we just appreciate actually all
the testimony we are hearing, so if we go a little over,
that's fine, but we will try to keep it within a certain
parameter.

    So, it gives me great pleasure to welcome Dana
van Gorder, a long time activist in our community on many
fronts, who is now the Lesbian and Gay Health Services
Coordinator at the San Francisco Department of Public
Health.

    **DANA VAN GORDER**

    **MR. VAN GORDER:** Thank you for having me
tonight. I did bring two documents, because there is
obviously a great deal to say about this subject, but it
won't be covered tonight. So I'll leave you with two
things.

    One is a document that's circulating among
mental health professionals in San Francisco that is
really a description of a variety of issues that we see
related to prevention issues, particularly for gay and
bisexual men in San Francisco, inclusive of youth, but I
think it has broad applicability to our community.

    The second is a listing of the Department of
Public Health contractual services for sexual minority youth that you might want to take a look at to get, you know, a very sort of initial sense of the kind of services that we’re funding around sexual minority youth.

I was asked if I could sort of put a figure on the sort of broad range of, you know, clinical services, mental health services that we provide to sexual minority youth in San Francisco. And, unfortunately, that’s difficult for us.

We know that in terms of contractual services, we are expending approximately $3 million on community-based agencies. Fortunately or unfortunately, most of those services relate to HIV, many of them to HIV prevention.

But the cost of the services that we are providing through our various clinics and what have you to youth is a difficult figure to actually pin down, though we would be happy to do it.

A great deal of time has been spent tonight really sort of talking about the effect of homophobia and racism on the health of sexual minority youth. And I don't think that that whole matter can be underscored.

But I think that San Francisco continues to need to focus a great deal of attention on providing a broad range, really a constellation, of services that continue
to address a number of different issues that will help to keep sexual minority youth healthier.

And insofar as time is short, I really want to just sort of list them very briefly. And these are really the result of a great deal of research that has been done around the prevention needs in our community as well as discussions among a number of health professionals.

Clearly, self-esteem is a major thing that we need to deal with with sexual minority youth in San Francisco. And sometimes I'm frustrated with, really, sort of believing that once a person has sort of sustained the damage that they have from their family of origin, and from schools and what have you, that we can really sort of make a meaningful impact on people's self-esteem, but I think we have to continue to do that.

We need to work with sexual minority youth through a broad range of services that help them to continue to develop gay and racial pride, and that help them deal with their internalized racism and their internalized homophobia.

We continue, even in San Francisco with the incredible number of services and community groups that exist, to see sexual minority youth and older folks, as well, who are very isolated from the rest of their community or from any sense of community, as well as from
any kinds of activities that really are providing them
with sustenance and meaning.

The role of socio-economics was touched on
earlier. And it's deeply troubling to me, given the very
clear connection between socio-economic status and the
health of sexual minority youth, that we don't have any
targeted economic development programs in San Francisco
that are attempting to provide continuing education and
job skills development for our youth, particularly, our
youth of color. And I believe that that is an area in
which we have to do a great deal of work.

Though many of the health challenges I think
were sexual minority youth really come from their history,
from family of origin and from the time, you know, before
they really sort of arrive in the hands of the people who
are dealing with them in the health system.

I also am afraid that there are a lot of
challenges to our health and well-being as sexual minority
folks that exist within our own community. And that I
think that we have to begin to deal with as well.

We live in a community in which I think many
youth are sort of challenged by the intense
objectification of youth and beauty and sex that exists in
our culture.

I hear many youth who describe the intense
pressure that they feel to be sexual and to be perfect. And a number of problems stem for them from some of those definitions within our culture. It leads to --

You know, I certainly see those kinds of issues around self-esteem, the need to feel sexually powerful and what have you, as fueling the speed epidemic in San Francisco which is of particular concern for young gay men, but increasingly for lesbians, as well.

There are a lot of issues that stem from family origin, but a number that also grow from our culture. I think, that cause many youth to have major problems with a split between their desire for sex and their ability to achieve intimacy, which has great ramifications, ultimately, in terms of our prevention efforts around HIV.

We unfortunately, I think, live in a community and culture where we need to begin to examine more carefully the sexual ethics that are occurring around us, particularly in the world of casual sex.

We continue to hear people who describe being treated rather poorly in the world of sex -- in casual sex, and a widespread belief that as individuals we are solely responsible for our health and well-being, and that we need not take responsibility for the health of others, something that I think we need to begin to deal with.

I think that it's no surprise that young queers
in our community, and this is true of Americans, I think, have a very poorly defined sense of their future.

And I think we need to begin to do more things that sort of challenge a belief that this is a culture of AIDS, and to help young queers believe that they have a future that is worth living for.

And I do want to stop for just a minute, to sort of talk about the notion of aging.

I believe that it's extremely important for us in developing health and mental health services in San Francisco to continue to separately empower youth and people of color around all of the issues that I have described. The sense of empowerment and identity that people have around their age and their racial identity is extremely important.

But I do want to put in one word of warning. I think a very profound problem, certainly for young gay men, and I think it's also a problem increasingly for young lesbians in San Francisco, is the problem of the inability to imagine aging as sexual minority folks.

As I said earlier, we built a culture in which there is enormous separation between people based on age.

I'm doing a lot of work with middle-aged gay men who are sort of describing a phenomenon in which they find it almost impossible, once they move into middle age,
sometimes as early as 30, to imagine what their lives are going to look like as they get older, and to find things that will sustain them in a vision of the future.

And as we build services in San Francisco to meet the needs of gay, bisexual and transgender youth, I think it's extremely important for us to remember that we must find ways to have young sexual minority folks and older sexual minority folks learn from one another and experience one another and respect one another. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I would like to welcome Kiki Whitlock of the -- Staff Attorney for the National Center for Lesbian Rights.

KIKI WHITLOCK

(For Shannon Minter)

MS. WHITLOCK: Hi, I'm standing in actually for Shannon Minter in his absence.

I'm Kiki Whitlock, transgender program coordinator, Asian AIDS Project.

THE REPORTER: Could you spell your name.

MS. WHITLOCK: That's K-i-k-i, Whitlock, W-h-i-t-l-o-c-k.

I'm a postoperative transsexual male to female. And when I was 16 I came out to my mother, actually, and told her that I was transexual.
The very first thing she wanted to do was to take me to a shrink because she thought that I had psychological problems.

And basically what Shannon was going to talk a little bit today about was the issue around the diagnosis that is in the diagnostic statistical manual called, "Gender Identity Disorder."

That was a really big problem for our youths, even back then, but certainly even continuing today. Many of our transgender youth and other lesbian, gay and bisexual people are slapped with this label at a really early age if they show signs of being, if they are males, too feminine; if they're females, too masculine. At an early age, they're thrown into institutions, mental institutions.

I think that that practice needs to stop, but I also think that it's important that people still need to know that that is currently happening, even today.

All I know is that I went through hell growing up as a transsexual person and knowing that I had gender identity issues. And even still today, many transgender youth are still going through the same hell. It needs to stop.

There needs to be more specific services for our transgender youth and other questioning youth, as well as
services for the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual and
transgender community. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you, Kiki.

Now, I'd like to welcome Ruth Hughes, Health
Program Coordinator for the Center for Special Problems.

RUTH HUGHES

MS. HUGHES: Good evening, Commissioners, other
queers and nonqueers. Just for the record, I'm a
57-year-old married lesbian. And because the president
has signed that law, my partner and I talked it over and
decided that we're not going to get divorced.

I am going to take a little privilege tonight
because I've been around for a long time. I tried to get
this presentation down to two minutes, and I couldn't do
it. I don't know what is wrong with me. It's four
minutes, but I'll try to get it shorter.

In December of 1980 --

I should also say, you know, I was really
feeling like when I got this letter to come and talk, I
was feeling like I'm really out of step with what is
exactly -- all of the things that are going on for sexual
minority youth. So I thought what I would do is just give
you kind of a historic -- some of the historical
background of where I think some of the sexual minority
youths service came from.
In December of 1980, the former -- sorry --

During the late 1970s adolescent service care providers in San Francisco began to notice the appearance of young people among the homeless populations who are identifying themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning their sexual orientation.

Many of the young people were presenting with mental health symptoms of depression, and often they were feeling suicidal. Either they thought about killing themselves or they actually attempted suicide by overdosing on pills, slashing their wrists, attempting to hang themselves.

Frequently, the youths were involved in drug use. Often, they had been physically abused by schoolmates and family members once their sexual orientation was known.

To add to the stress of their existence, most had no visible means of support or skills with which to provide for themselves.

A group of volunteers who were teachers -- some of those folks I heard speak tonight, by the way, a couple of people that I knew back in the '70s -- a group of volunteers who were teachers, juvenile probation officers, social workers and other adult lesbian, gay, bisexual volunteers, formed a group called the Sexual Minority
Youth Coalition, or SMYC, to find ways in which to assist
the pushed-away queer youths to find responsible help with
their problems and someone to talk to.

A result of the efforts of these individuals was
that the Department of Public Health in San Francisco
funded the Sexual Minority Youth Program at the Center for
Special Problems, which is an out-patient mental health
clinic.

In December of 1980, the former John Hurstom,
was hired as coordinator of the program at CSP. And in
February of 1981, I was hired to work with John.

After seeing about ten young people and talking
with about 75 youth care providers, it was probably more,
and school administrators, juvenile authorities about the
availability of services for these young people, we began
to see a pattern, and that pattern formed homophobia.

This resulted in our decision to begin doing
in-service training for other community agencies, as well
as to continue providing counselling referral and acting
as an advocate for sexual minority youth.

Before his death to AIDS in 1986, John worked
aggressively with community groups, churches, gay
businesses, City government, juvenile authorities and
other community volunteers to find funding for what is now
known as Larkin Street Youth Center.
The sexual minority youth program at CSP continues today to provide individual and group therapy for queer youths. Lately, however, I see between five and ten young people a year.

My duties also are administrative, and I work with the adult population in our clinic. There is just one of me.

During my preparation for this evening, I made -- I decided, no, I really feel like I've been so involved in the clinic and just doing my work, I really don't know what is going on in the community.

So, I sat at my phone yesterday and I made several, just random telephone calls to youth agencies. And I smile because I called LYRIC. And if anybody here has called LYRIC's line, I was on the phone for 20 minutes because they give referrals to different kinds of groups and they'll say, push another button.

So I went through the entire series and I was sitting there thinking, this is absolutely amazing. Because when we started, this did not exist. And now, every possible kind of support service does exist for young people who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual.

But just because we have these services doesn't mean we can stop funding them. I've been sitting back here for the last couple of hours listening to people
talking about, remember that pattern that I talked to you about way back at the beginning, the pattern of homophobia?

One of the problems that has occurred, I believe, over the last -- certainly over the last five years in terms of the budget fights that have existed, is the first thing that we eliminate is education. And how we can stop --

Well, you know, let's be real. I don't think we are ever going to stop homophobia or any of the other isms, but we can maintain a sense of vigilance over them. And we can't say they exist; therefore, we cannot direct any money or attention or energy to them.

I personally think it's kind of shocking to hear that we have so many really good programs available, like in the schools. And still I remember ten years ago standing in front of the Delinquency Prevention Commission hearing someone else talk about the homophobia in the schools.

Well, homophobia exists everywhere. And the reason that I'm here is because of homophobia. The other reason that I'm here is because of mental health. And young people who are experiencing that feeling of being invisible because they are homosexual or because they are queer will continue to need mental health services.
And I implore you to do -- if I ask you to do one thing, it is that you really support training people to unlearn homophobia so that perhaps one day there won't really be a need for mental health services. Thank you.

CHARIPERSON KNUTZEN: Julie Graham, Therapist.

JULIE GRAHAM

MS. GRAHAM: I'm kind of at a loss about what to tell you in two minutes that at this time of night is sort of inspiring.

One of the things I will say is that, you know, I'm a therapist. I work with young people. I started working with young people with HIV.

I was one of the co-founders of Bay Positives, which is to empower young people to serve themselves. Projects like Bay Positives, Street Survival, LYRIC are incredibly crucial to young people being able to make it in the world. That is true role modelling.

As a therapist, one of the things that I want you to know is that -- God, yes, mental health services are really desperately needed, but often who the mental health services are for shouldn't be the young people. It should be their parents. It should be their teachers, it should be their -- administration. It should be the churches.

What people are dealing with is the effects of
heterosexism. That's what is causing the suicide. That's what's causing folks to get HIV. That's what's causing all these social conditions that you're hearing about. It's the effects of heterosexism. That's huge.

And what -- you know, I guess until people can come up with some ideas about really making huge changes in society, I think the best that we can do is continue to support peer empowerment programs, continue to --

I guess the biggest thing would be to educate anyone who works with any child, anywhere, about the assumptions that they are making about that child.

That the assumptions that they are making about that child, if they're a preschool teacher, if they're a counselor, if they're in any way coming into contact with a kid, that those assumptions could kill that child some day.

That those assumptions are going to be devastating for that child and devastating for society as a result of that. So, I think that is what I can say in two minutes.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Actually, you did say it in two minutes, so that's great. Thank you.

Renee Smith, Adolescent Mental Health Services Coordinator, Walden House. Thank you. Welcome.

/ / / / /
heterosexual youth and affirm the reality of the queer youth and make the topic relevant and will also build a safe place for closet queer youth to come out and receive information in a meaningful way.

It should be noted that many queer youth run away because of homophobia within the family and the community. This obviously impacts one's self-esteem and ability to trust others and to trust formal institutional-like services.

Therefore, individual workers and agencies need to be hypervigilant in meeting the needs of queer youth because, believe me, queer youth, as a former queer youth myself and a person that works with queer youth, we are hypervigilant in sizing up people in agencies whether they will be queer friendly or not.

As my final point, I want to talk about getting the word out about queer-specific groups, agencies and information hot lines. Advertise, advertise, advertise, in all languages. Put posters on the walls of waiting rooms, in all brochures, in listings, whatever.

Many queer youths may not directly ask for referrals, but they will see and write down information for themselves on their own if they see it. So, let the word out. Thanks.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to welcome
Kelly O'Neal, Director of Community Building, Street Survival Project.

KELLY O'NEAL

MS. O'NEAL: Hi, I'm Kelly O'Neal. I'm the director of the Street Survival Project. We are an employment and training program for young women who are living on their own.

We don't offer housing, but it became an issue for us because a lot of our staff -- most of our staff are living on their own, and many were in and out of homelessness and are unstably housed, and this had a large impact on their employment as well as their schooling.

If you do not have a place to live or a place to sleep, it's really hard to get to work on time if you don't know where you're going to be staying that night.

For us, one of the hardest things is that there is really a lack of options for young people, especially young people who are living on their own and supporting themselves.

There are group homes and things like that, but they don't work for everybody. And there needs to be more options for people who want different things.

And a lot of people don't really want to become part of a system, and just because they're homeless, which a lot of people are homeless, just because they're queer
and got kicked out of their houses, they end up being
criminalized and become part of a system that they don't
want to become a part of. And so they often avoid service
providers.

Also, for people who want to live independently,
the system is totally set up against that. If you're
under 18, you can't rent an apartment. It's illegal. If
you try to rent from someone, they can be arrested for
harboring a minor.

So the only thing available to you is to become
emancipated, which if you don't have a job, you can't
become emancipated. It's sort of a cyclical thing.

Even if you do become emancipated and you're
under 18, there are a lot of people that won't rent to you
if you're 15 or 16 because they just assume that you can't
hold down a job or pay rent. And so it's really hard to
be living on your own in that situation.

One of the other things that has been really
hard for us, in terms of being an agency that employs
people who become providers for other young people, is
that staff at our agency are going to meetings and being
colleagues of people that work at other agencies that serve
homeless youth. And it's really difficult to try to
become a colleague with someone and go to meetings and
network with them and then at night go and be their
client.

So, there needs to be options for that reason as well, because young people are providers of services. And I think a lot of times we forget that, and that having to be a client of people that you're trying to be a colleague with undermines your professionalism and things that you're trying to accomplish.

My suggestions are: One, that we find ways to give rental assistance, especially for young people, and especially for young people who aren't HIV positive, because there are a lot more services, especially among housing, for people who are HIV positive. And it sets up a system where people often think that that's a good option, to become positive, because there are more services available.

Two, that we need to have more jobs that pay living wages for people who are supporting themselves and jobs that people can learn skills and aren't dead-end jobs, like working at Taco Bell.

And, three, things like group homes that are tenant-run by young people that they can make the rules themselves and don't have to become part of the system to live in it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Okay. Thanks a lot. If we can hear from Angela Osirio from Bobbie's Love and Care
Rainbow Home.

ANGELA OSIRIO

ANGELA: Hi, my name is Angela. And I'm representing Bobbie's Love and Care Rainbow Group Home, which is a nonprofit organization, located at 422 Peninsula. It's one of the first gay, lesbian, transgender group homes in northern California.

Bobbie's Rainbow is a six-day facility that serves young people from the age of zero to 18 years old. The home is geared to help -- excuse me -- young people that are within our system for various reasons. It's a home where the young people can be open with their sexuality.

Bobbie's Rainbow provides daily structure, counselling, and weekly therapy for all clients. We would like to see more role models, tutors in the communities, as well as in the schools, for the young people.

Bobbie's is a stepping stone for the young people. The counselling that we do here will help the young people be more productive in society -- sorry.

I just heard some news that kind of puzzled me. They said that the group home was closed, and we're not closed, and that's the reason why we are not getting any clients. And I guess it just has to do with the heterosexual group homes in the community. When they're
trying to place kids within Bobbie's, they're saying
there's no place for these kids to go. So these kids are
just kind of stuck where they're at.

    So, it's kind of terrible, sad.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: But you are open?

ANGELO: Yes, we are open. And we have six
beds. We have four clients there right now.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Okay. Thank you.

ANGELO: Any questions you want to ask me?

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: No. Thanks a lot.

We'll take a five-minute break for our
stenographer. We thank her very much for her work.

(SHORT RECESS)

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: I'd like to resume the
hearing. And this begins the session on youth and health,
but before we get going, we've been just tremendously
successful tonight. Everyone who wanted to speak has
spoken. So, what that means is that we are running a
little bit behind in time.

    We are going to be beeping at a minute thirty
seconds. And please try to keep your remarks to two
minutes. If you have additional information that you want
to provide, just please let us have it in written form.

If you don't have it written out tonight, you can
certainly add it to the record. We are going to allow
RENEE SMITH

MS. SMITH:  Good evening, my name is Renee Smith, and I'm the coordinator of adolescent mental health services at Walden House.

I'll just kind of briefly tell you a little bit about Walden House, which is a --

It's a residential treatment facility which serves on dual diagnosis teenagers ages 13 to 17. And the dual diagnosis part is that these youth have all been identified as having both substance abuse and psychiatric problems.

We have two facilities in the City, an all-girls facility in the Ingleside district; and in the Haight, an all-boys facility.

Of these 60 youth, at any given time, we find that 10 to 20 percent identify as queer or are questioning. Those are only the kids that will tell us.

So, what I'm here to kind of speak to a little bit tonight is I want people to have some kind of an understanding of what it's like for a kid who has to live in an institutional setting, because of the severity of their problems.

Imagine that you are a 14-year-old Latina female. And you are a heroin addict. And prior to being a heroin addict, you had really severe mood swings, which
were really frightening to you, made you very irritable and volatile. And then you would get very depressed.

You come from a family of heroin addicts, and you've run away from home because of the abuse that you've experienced in your family due to the substances that family members have been abusing.

In addition to the fact that you have come out to your family, and they have been unable to tolerate the fact that you are a gay or lesbian because they are very religious and feel that this is -- you're going to go to hell.

So, what do you need, being this kid?

Well, you know, if you've committed a couple of crimes and you end up being arrested and you're a heroin addict, you need a youth detox in the City of San Francisco because heroin is a very dangerous drug to have to come down from.

When you end up in juvenile hall, you hope that after everybody has taken their mandatory lesbian, gay, sensitivity training that you will meet a counsellor who can encourage you to participate in the in-house substance abuse program.

Then, when your judge sees that you're motivated, you go to a residential program where everybody who is paid by state or county dollars also is mandated to
take a sensitivity training class in order to understand
the needs of lesbian and gay youth, and hopefully there
you met a family therapist who is bilingual, who can talk
to your monolingual-speaking mother and help her to
understand how you are not going to go to hell just
because you are a gay Latina female, and who is also
trained in working with multiproblem families and so can
help you because you desperately want to have a
relationship with your family to be able to begin to talk
with them again.

And then if it doesn't work out, you hope that
there is a gay or lesbian group home or foster home that
you can go to in order to help you to reintegrate into
society and become a productive member.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: If you could stay for a
second here, we have one question from Commissioner
Salazar-Hobson.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSON: There was a
previous speaker, one of the youth speakers, who tried to
highlight the importance of having a segregated recovery
program for gay youth in terms of emphasizing. And I know
there's some plans around regarding Campbell House and
what have you.

Do you fully support that emphasis, or is that
already being done?

MS. GRAHAM: What I found in my experience is that in the girl's facility, the girls are much more open to having alternative lifestyles and to being able to tolerate their peers being, you know, queer or questioning. And they seem to get along quite well with one another.

There doesn't seem to be the level of victimization that happens in the boys' facility where it's much more difficult and due to -- what society feels about what a man's role should be, you know, in the world.

It seems hard for straight identified males to tolerate the queer and questioning males, even to tolerate the questioning, you know, piece of it.

So, I wouldn't say like across the board, but I would say, in some instances, that that would definitely be helpful to some young people in order that they not be victimized, you know, that they have a recovery program that is helpful, safe and beneficial to them.

The primary thing is safe, I think. And also to have role models and to be in a group of peers like yourself, you now, to have that support your recovery process.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I would like to welcome
Larry Turner, member and volunteer at Bay Positives.

LARRY TURNER

MR. TURNER: My name is Larry Turner. I'm speaking on behalf of Antini Hogan, who is the executive director of Bay Positives.

I'm a member and a volunteer at Bay Positives. I have been diagnosed with AIDS for one year and have been living with the disease since I was 14.

Here are some issues and needs I would like to address. Young adults with HIV and AIDS need more places they can feel comfortable and safe, as well as a place where they can go to talk and relate with other young adults about similar issues.

Bay Positives has provided me with various services, including case management, one-on-one counselling, emotional support, and recreational, as well as support groups in HIV and everything, as well as other services.

I feel Bay Positives will meet my needs to the best of their abilities. And I feel that young adults with HIV and AIDS need someone who love them unconditionally and someone -- and somewhere they can go and feel a part of, because for me, I didn't feel a part of anything.

There isn't much out there for young adults.
People don't advertise where to go to get help, to get support when you're young and positive. There is a lot of prevention but not a lot of support for young adults when they are diagnosed with HIV or AIDS.

In closing, I want to deeply express the importance of care for young adults when they are positive and how other young adults can help each other in surviving and living with this disease.

Too many people feel lost and alone. We need to let it be known that there is hope out there in all these different agencies and everything else. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: The next speaker is Henry Ocampo, Prevention Project Leader, Chances for Youth Collaborative.

HENRY OCAMPO

MR. OCAMPO: Hello, my name is Henry Ocampo, O-c-a-m-p-o. I work at the Living Well project, as the youth prevention leader.

I'm talking today for Chances for Youth, which is the first collaborative of its kind between four agencies that deal with HIV prevention for queer and questioning youth of color, 25 and under.

The four participating agencies are Brothers Network, Living Well Project, Larkin Street Youth Center, and Proyecto Contra SIDA.
This collaboration started last year. And within this past year we pretty much kicked butt, I'd say. We created a community for youth of color, individual community for youth of color, like the API community, the Afro-American community, and the Latino community.

We had peer-run, peer-led programs, where all of our programs are youth-of-color led. It's multi-gendered, bisexual men and women, transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual, et cetera.

We work on race identity, self-esteem, skills building and all these other things, but it's not enough. There are two things that we really -- that I want to emphasize today that we need: support and funding.

In terms of support, we need primary support from management and our agencies, that our programs are not just token programs for our agencies but that youth programs are integrated fully into the agencies in terms of, for example, if we have special events for the agency, that if we do have a youth program, that we are sensitive to our clients or members who are under 21, you know, that usually cannot attend these programs.

We also need technical assistance for youth providers in terms of teaching them how to do contract management, evaluations, and servicing youth under 18. We also need a community space for youth of color.
In terms of funding, we need more funding for basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing. We need more funding for female specific programs, transgender programs.

We need funding for collaborative projects for youth of color. And also we need more funding for queer youth of color living with HIV.

Lastly, I just want to emphasize that in terms of youth programming, youth of color programming, to have these programs run by youth of color not from these older people, whatnot, that think they know -- you know, I was a youth before. I know how it's been, yeah, yeah, yeah.

That it be peer run -- peer led, peer run.

That's it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thanks a lot.

Shivaun Nestor, who is a Health educator with the WEDGE Program.

SHIVAUN NESTOR

MS. NESTOR: Hello, my name is Shivaun Nestor. S-h-i-v, as in Victor, a-u-n.

And I am here to speak for the WEDGE Program, a health department project that provides HIV and prevention education to youth ages 12 to 18.

We're concerned about gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgender youth, especially the high rates of infection.
among queer teen males.

The sexual minority youth issues are addressed throughout all of our basic training. Educators and HIV positive speakers are trained to use gender neutral language, to be proactively inclusive, for instance, through the use of activities with queer characters and to counter students' homophobic remarks and behavior.

On a fundamental level, disempowerment and lack of self-esteem is at the root of the rapid spread of HIV among youth of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Currently, WEDGE is in most public middle and high schools. We are concerned about the amount of gay hatred we encounter.

Despite the ongoing and committed efforts of the School District's health programs office and of organizations like CUAV, many schools are still not safe places for sexual minority youth.

Even some health teachers do not protect queer teens from peer harassment. It is not uncommon for students to act surprised when WEDGE educators confront them on such behavior.

The problem begins in elementary school, where the worst taunt is, "That's so gay."

By middle school, predators against sexual
minorities is entrenched and have devastating effects on
the self-esteem and health of young, gay, lesbian,
bisexual or transgender teens.

These problems are often more severe in private
and continuation schools as well as youth organizations
that don't target queer adolescents.

Within schools, we need one district-wide
administrator and faculty support, and additional
resources for programs such as the School District support
services for sexual minority youth and CUAV. Mandated and
expanded training for administrators and teachers,
particularly those in disciplines besides science and
health where such training is routine.

Why must the only queer positive messages be
given in human sexuality classes? Doesn't this
perpetuate the stereotype that queer folks are defined by
their genitals.

Expand your support for programs in the earlier
grades such as a lesbian-gay parent association overcoming
homophobia in elementary classrooms.

Sexual minority teens need community-based
support as well, including expansion of age-appropriate
recreational and social opportunities such as LYRIC, more
programs targeting queer youth of color such as AQUA.

However, the whole community must take
responsibility for ots sexual minority youth. All youth service providers need training to assist them in dealing with their own homophobia, sensitize them to the needs of queer youth, and train them to counteract prejudice among their clients. Such training should be required of all youth-serving and family-parent programs that receive city funding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Okay. Thank you.

We have two sections to go, and it's nine o'clock, so I'd really like to finish this section up in half an hour. All the sections, if we could stick to two minutes each.

Again, if someone has written testimony that they would like to submit and just introduce themselves to move that along, that would be fine at this point.

Why don't we hear it. This is a section on youth services. If I could call on Winna Davis, who is the senior grants manager with the Mayor's Office of Children, Youth and Families. Welcome.

WINNA DAVIS

MS. DAVIS: Good evening, Commissioners. I'll be brief.

I'm here this evening to give you information on the programs and services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth that are funded by the
Mayor's Office of Children, Youth and Families.

The Lavender Youth Program and Recreation Information Center, also known as LYRIC, receives funding from MOCYF.

There are two programs. The LYRIC after-school program and the LYRIC youth talk line. The after-school component is a daily drop-in center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.

LYRIC participants come from all neighborhoods in the City. Their economic, housing status, ethnic and racial composition is quite diverse.

With the funding coming from our office, they serve about 150 youths between the ages of 12 to 17. The second component is the LYRIC youth talk line, which is a peer support phone line for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. It is estimated that 3600 callers age 18 and under contact the line.

The primary goal of the talk line is to connect callers to the supportive community of their peers. During the off hours, there is a 24-hour recording that contains information about communities of services available to the youth.

MOCYF also funds the Queer Youth Training Collaborative. This program provides job training and career development skills to lesbian, gay, bisexual,
questioning and transgender youth ages 17 and younger. This program serves about 235 youths in San Francisco.

MOCYF funds other collaboratives that also provides services to these young people, but the focus isn't necessarily within this particular direction. They are served; however, that isn't the primary focus.

Basically, that's it. Thank you.

Any questions?

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Of the 10 percent of the queer youth population, what is the percentage you allocate specifically for queer youth to different agencies?

MS. DAVIS: I'm sorry, but at this time I'm not prepared to give you that information.

Primarily because MOCYF is, as you know, is kind of a relatively new organization and we are in the process of putting together an MIS system in which we can collect demographic information and then be able to give you those kinds of statistics and percentages.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSON: Just one point of information.

Has transportation or the ability of youth to get to LYRIC services or similar services ever been a problem?

Has that been addressed through a voucher system
or anything like that, or have you found that not to be a
problem that youth can get to LYRIC programs?

MS. DAVIS: Let me just say that I'm not aware
of that; however, Ken Bukowski will be here to speak for
LYRIC.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

Next is Mitch Thompson, who is Assistant
Recreation Director at the San Francisco Department of
Recreation and Parks.

MITCHELL THOMPSON

MR. THOMPSON: Hi, my name is Mitchell
Thompson. And I am the Assistant Recreation Director.

I have a quick list of three categories of what
Rec and Park currently offers now, what we need, and what
I personally would like.

We offer a recreation site designated as a
safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and

gay frōemd;u youth. And this site is located at Eureka
Valley Recreation Center, which is 100 Collingwood Street
in the Castro.

We also have at that site a part-time assistant
recreation director position providing up to 20 hours a
week of programming for lesbian, gay, bisexual and
transgender youth. This position is the Recreation and
Park Department liaison to LYRIC as well.
The program includes sports, art classes, games and a safe space to hang out. We offer afternoon and evening programming. And we are offering a Friday night safe space until 10:00. And we began offering Saturday programming about several weeks ago.

Now, what the department needs is full-time programming designated to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youths.

We also need a full-time recreation director sympathetic to the needs, issues and concerns of this community.

To this date, there is still no sensitivity training offered on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning youth down in the Recreation and Park Department.

Recreation staff directors and administrators all really need this training. A lot of these people are in contact with hundreds of youth a week.

We also need outreach and interdepartmental cooperation within the County Office of Education, the Department of Social Services, and other youth programs, to interact with these programs and cooperate with these programs.

We also need more safe sites, offering programs events, even simple access to information throughout the
City. We also need designated funding for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth programming.

Finally, what I would like to see is a full-time administrative level director of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth programming for the Recreation and Parks Department to insure quality programming at designated safe sites, to plan and implement departmental sensitivity training and to promote outreach and insure information accessibility from employees and youth participants.

I would also like to see a summer camp for LGBTQ youth. And I would also like more of a department-wide focus on social issues for the youth at risk, including youth issues of homelessness, poor self-esteem, drug abuse and health.

I would like to be also finally allowed to use the word queer in relation to the Recreation and Parks Department, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender programming just in terms of respect and acknowledging the queer youth community. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I would like to call Meredith Broome, Youth Services Coordinator, Queer Youth Training Collaborative.

/ / / / /
MEREDITH BROOME

MS. BROOME: I'm actually the program director of the Queer Youth Training Collaborative.

We are five agencies, LYRIC, Bay Positives, Brothers Network, Community United Against Violence and Center for Young Women's Development Street Survival Project, and also the San Francisco Unified School District, and the San Francisco libraries are a part of our collaborative.

We aim to give job training and employment to queer youth. You might ask why is job training and employment essential to queer youth in San Francisco and everywhere?

Well, I'm going to be really brief. I broke it down into two categories, philosophical and practical.

Beginning with the philosophical, obviously, it's important for youth to have a safe place to learn essential employment skills. And that's pretty self-explanatory.

It's hard to come to work if you're feeling really depressed and suicidal. It's hard to concentrate on learning new skills and retaining that information if you haven't had a place to sleep the night before, if you don't feel safe to be who you are, et cetera and so forth.

The practical thing is the large percent of the
young people who come to our program either in employment or referring them to other jobs are what they call unstably housed. They're homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, or they're trying to support themselves and make it on their own.

And so, of course, employment is very, very important. More important than just being employed is getting a living wage for what you do.

So we try -- most job training programs pay a minimum wage, and we try to pay a higher wage so that people will have more of a chance of making it.

One last thing, we realized really quickly when we started this collaborative that we can't just address the employment needs of youth and then send them packing and say good luck.

We also have to face the issue of that they need housing. They need mental health. They need food. They need tokens for transportation. They need so much more than just employment.

And that's for the recommendation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Ken Bukowski, who is the Executive Director of the Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center. Welcome, Ken.

/ / / / /
MR. BUKOWSKI: Thank you, Martha. I'm glad it
gave you great pleasure introducing us.

Good evening, I'll try to stick to my two
minutes since it is late.

My name is Ken Bukowski. I'm the Executive
Director of LYRIC, Lavender Youth Recreation and
Information Center.

When LYRIC started out about eight years ago,. We started recreational programming and weekly support
groups. Now, we provide, five days a week after school, a
drop-in program, which provides recreational activities,
support groups, videos, and lots of other activities for
youths under 18.

We have a youth talk line, an info line, a young
men's HIV prevention program, a young women's program,
which provides health programming and health workshops for
young women, a job training program that Meredith spoke
about. And we will be getting a leadership training
program, as well as an academic tutoring program.

And yet with all those programs which last year
served a thousand young people and the talk line itself
that Winna Davis from MOCYF mentioned, received 12,000
calls last year, even with all of that, it's not enough.

The problem is that we are just one of the few
safe places in this City, in fact, in the Bay Area, for
queer youth. And as one of the few places, we are
expected to meet the multitude of needs for a very diverse
population.

Seventy percent of the youth who come to LYRIC
and participate in the activities are youth of color. We
have a very diverse population. Queer youth population
comes from every single social and economic group in the
City, every single possible diversity issue in the City.
And one agency can't serve them all.

What we need to do is support and expand the
program, the kind of programming that LYRIC offers, and
start a new kind of programming to meet the other needs,
many of which you heard tonight, housing issues, mental
health services, other counselling types of programs,
 basic food and shelter issues.

We also need to push straight-identified service
providers to be safe places for queer youth so youth don't
only have to depend on queer service providers to get all
their services met.

There are a lot more needs and a lot more issues
I want to talk about. And I'll provide it later in
written testimony.

But the one last thing I want to say tonight is
that there is an upcoming Youth Summit in a couple of
weeks. And Mayor Brown has said one of his main goals of that summit is to make San Francisco a youth friendly city. And what I'm hoping with our hearing tonight and with the support of this commission, the Youth Commission and the Human Rights Commission, and soon, the Board of Supervisors, is that we will make sure that after the Youth Summit that San Francisco is also a queer-youth friendly city. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Commissioner Salazar-Hobson.

COMMISSIONER SALAZAR-HOBSON: Mr. Bukowski, it's a pleasure to see you tonight.

Would you address whether there is a transportation barrier issue in terms of providing services in youth getting to where they need to be or has that been taken care of?

MR. BUKOWSKI: Youth have been amazingly resourceful in being able to get to LYRIC. And while there hasn't been an overwhelming call based on transportation issues, it would be great.

When that point was brought up, somebody suggested that that if queer youth could maybe get free fast passes, or some of the youth who come to our program could get additional fast passes to get around the City.

We have had youth who come to our center from
Redwood City twice a week, who come from all over the Bay Area and will travel for up to two hours just to come to LYRIC activities.

When you're the only thing out there, sometimes they find a way. But it would be helpful if there are additional ways to meet some of those needs. Because I think especially a lot of the youth from low income families, they have a multitude of needs that aren't being met. One of those is transportation, and food and shelter, and some of the other things we talked about.

So, if you have some ideas, I'd welcome to hear them.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thanks.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: I'd like to welcome David Weiner, the director of the Visitation Valley Community Beacon.

DAVID WEINER

MR. WEINER: Good evening, my name is David Weiner. I'm the director of the Visitation Valley Community Beacon.

For those of you who might not be familiar with the Beacon, the Beacon is a community center located within a school that offers a collaborative approach to youth development.

We are one of the first two Beacon sites in San
Francisco, along with Everett Middle School, which is Community Bridges Beacon. Beacon utilizes public facilities that formerly went unused.

Today, out site at the Visitacion Valley Middle School posts a wide array of opportunities and supports and services for youth and their families.

Our after-school program for these kids offers a variety of activities including tutoring, dance, ceramics, cultural clubs, cooking and computer classes.

We have seven hours of recreation programs after each school day, including basketball and girls-only sports, intramurals, and swimming.

Our family resource center brings information and access to residents, including job training and community and school involvement opportunities, food and clothing banks, social and legal services.

Outreach programs offer services ranging from translation into five languages to youth development projects at YGC.

Collaborations with the San Francisco Police Department, San Francisco State University, City College, the YMCA, Red Cross, Gossimer Village, the Department of Park and Rec and several others allow us to offer a lot of different programs that are redirected to our site, including substance abuse, and in-home tutoring, ESL
classes, homelessness prevention resources, and many
cultural and sports activities for the youth and families
of Visitacion Valley.

In partnership with Visitacion Valley Middle
School, the Beacon has become a healthy start operational
site. Healthy start funding, along with the match from
MOCYF funds have given us the opportunity to emphasize
health, wellness and social support for children, school
staff, and the community.

We are developing novel relationships with the
Unified School District and the Department of Public
Health that will bring comprehensive and sustainable
health and mental health services to Visitacion Valley.

Often, these health programs are our first link
to gay and lesbian youth. As a result, the school health
department has created a healthy school team. Our school
site person makes presentations to our staff, prepares
displays related to sexual minority youth, holds
school-wide events and provides mentorship towards the
students at our site.

Our health program offers teen services
including counselling and information through school
nurses and the newly created Department of Public Health
Teen Health Center located at the village.

Mental health services on site provide a place
for gay and lesbian youth to work out the sometimes
critical issues related to their status.

Beacon is committed to serving all youth in
Visitacion Valley and to that end we have tried to provide
an environment that is supportive, attractive and useful
to all elements of our community. Thanks.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: The next speaker is
Charles Anderson, the Executive Director of the Boys and
Girls Club. He's not here.

So on to Jade Kwan, Health Educator, Chameleon
Program, Asian AIDS Project.

JADE KWAN

MR. KWAN: Hi, my name is Jade. And I am from
Club Metamorphosis, which is a transgender support group at
the Asian AIDS Project.

And I'd like to talk to you about my own
feelings about growing up as a queer youth and also some
of the things that we can do.

I used to --

I feel that I'm a very sensitive person. And I
used to shed a lot of tears and have a lot of sadness a
lot of the times when I was growing up.

And often I'd (unintelligible) from the anger
that I had inside because of so much conflict that you
feel. And oftentimes, my (unintelligible) as a result of
having so many tears.

But despite that, I'm one of the lucky ones because I found Club Metamorphosis. A friend referred me there. And there was a nurturing and loving environment.

And when I began going to Club Metamorphosis, I began to grow and love through the support of my transgender community.

And now I no longer ask why I am the way I am. I ask how we can do something to make my brothers and sisters in the community be more fulfilled, because I think as a youth it's a right that we should be loved and cared for.

So some of the things that I think would help would be support groups because usually family and society aren't very accepting, and also support groups allow us to share information which benefits each other.

Peer leaders and role models, and part of that is more health educators, because there is only one health educator at Asian AIDS Project, and there are a lot of transgender people out there.

And I'll be glad to show you them if you want to see them. A safe space for transgender youth and queer youth, like AQUA, where I would like to commend them on making me feel welcomed there. Supportive and sensitive medical care because it helps us become more of who we are.
inside. And the more comfortable we feel, the more that
we can help this City also grow.

And also to understand that we are hard-working,
caring and loving people, and that we are also a diverse
community. We are outreach workers. Some of us are
engineers. A lot of us have degrees from very prestigious
schools. So, we are good people.

And also it would help if the leadership of the
City recognized us. I appreciate that the Youth
Commission is here today and that the Human Rights
Commission is here today.

But I'm sort of -- I'm upset that there is one
very important person that is not here today, and that's
the Mayor.

And, finally, I'd like to say that we, as queer
youth, we love and we care and therefore we are people,
too. And I'd like to thank you for the chance to speak
here. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much.

I'd like to call Kiky, who needs to speak now.

Thank you.

KIKY SOLIS

KIKY: I just want to say before I spoke that
thank you for listening.

I've been exposed to the gay community since I
was little. I don't have any horror stories to say about
gay bashing or coming out of the closet, just some
two-bit, want-to-be, unaware, hurtful, closed-minded,
stupid ignoramus, homophobic fool. Sorry, I had to let
that out.

Even though I have lived a rough life, this does
not mean I've gone deaf. I see the pain, the agony and
the depression that each of my friends are living.

I am 18. I've seen my friends get out of the
closet and out of the house because of it. This shouldn't
be.

I am a bisexual. And I don't care who knows.
I'm not afraid to say my sexuality, so why should society
be afraid of me? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thanks a lot.

Peter Russell, Director of the Gay and Lesbian
Teen Intervention Program.

PETER RUSSELL

MR. RUSSELL: Good evening. I'm Dr. Peter
Russell. I'm the coordinator of the Gay and Lesbian Teen
Intervention Program, a program of the YMCA of San
Francisco.

At the GALTIP program we provide individual,
couple, group and family counselling, we do programming
and outreach to schools, and we do training to all youth
service providers to create more accepting environments
for gay and lesbian and bisexual, transgender, questioning
youths.

As a GALTIP coordinator, I also provide training
consultation to San Mateo County schools to assist in the
new creation of the educational environments, which are
affirming, supportive and safe for these young people.

In spite of continued progress on this front,
schools remain dangerous environments for queer and
questioning youth who experience blatant discrimination,
social isolation, daily harassment, physical threats and
assault.

Because of the stigma associated with gay
bashing, huge numbers of queer youth remain silent,
fearing that disclosure of their victimization will be met
with insensitivity, inadequate protection and repeated
victimization.

If homophobia continues to go uninterrupted in
public and in classrooms, at home, young people, straight
and gay, will continue to learn the values of hatred,
bigotry and discrimination.

Anti-homophobia in school is essential to the
creation and maintenance of healthy learning environments
for all.

Queer harassment policies, which include sexual
orientation as a protected category, must be developed and
publicized to entire school communities so that the
consequences of harassment are made clear to all.

Faculty, staff, and students must intervene to
thwart the verbal and physical harassment of others.

Schools must create the conditions necessary for
queer faculty and staff to come out without negative
consequence, thereby serving as on-campus role models.

Gay, straight alliances in the schools must be
established and maintained in order to create a climate of
belonging for all.

Respect for the confidentiality of students who
confide in teachers, staff or administrators must be
strictly guarded.

Teachers, administrators and staff must be
trained to better understand the needs of the gay and
lesbian students they serve.

Diversity and sexual orientation must be
addressed openly and sensitively in the health education
curriculums which have traditionally denied the mere
existence of queer youth.

Finally, school library and media holdings must
be adequately maintained in order to provide students and
staff with accurate and up-to-date information about their
sexuality.
As a mental health professional, I am a visionary. I am committed to working toward the elimination of homophobia in all environments, including our schools, through my work with the YMCA's gay and lesbian and teen intervention program.

When I completed my Ph.D. in clinical psychology, I had no idea that I would spend the majority of my time begging schools to allow me in through their doors to provide the type of training which will create safer environments for youth.

Homophobia undermines the basic freedom of all students, faculty and staff in our school system. Queer and questioning youth must learn by example that all individuals are entitled to protection of their basic human rights regardless of all individual differences.

Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Dr. Russell, is the program offered in San Francisco, the one that you just mentioned?

DR. RUSSELL: This program is a program of the San Francisco YMCA, but because of the number of services available in the city our efforts are really geared toward San Mateo County. So, a majority of our services are provided in that county.

Thank you.
CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to call Jose Garcia, a young person from LYFE, Lambda Youth and Family Empowerment.

JOSE GARCIA

MR. GARCIA: Hello, and thank you for having me here.

I am a -- I was a peer educator at LYFE program when it was federally funded at Lyon-Martin and Women's Health Services.

Because of the five-year grant, we are not being funded anymore, but the community advisory board has taken the program and they're trying to bring it back. But they need funding. Without funding, all the great ideas they have cannot be implemented successfully.

Since we're going to keep it short and sweet, I'm just going to talk about the basic need for the mentoring program, one of the most important aspects of the LYFE program and the most distinct. And it's basically, a brand new concept.

I guess what we are asking for everybody, not only you, but the whole community in San Francisco, is support and confidence that intergenerational relationships can and will work, if the support is there and the funding, of course.

I think, being a gay youth, I understand the
necessity for bridging the gaps between older queers and younger queers, because like everybody said today, the problem with speed, drugs and AIDS and other problems of aging and stuff, we cannot resolve with ourselves, and we cannot talk to other queer youth who are friends about it. We need other people who understand us.

Some of us don't live with our parents and don't have other role models who are adults. And a lot of us do not know where to meet older gay people because of the -- I don't know why, but LYFE does offer an atmosphere that is safe, where we can meet other people who are older and can help us in our struggle to live decently and be productive people in the society.

So, please give us the funding. We need the money and the support. And I think it's a great program. You will not regret it. Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: Come forth, the juvenile justice system.

I would like to welcome Sergeant Michael Jefferies, Youth Program Services Coordinator, San Francisco Police Department.

SGT. MICHAEL JEFFERIES

SGT. JEFFERIES: Thank you very much, and good evening.

I'll keep my remarks very brief, because I have
handouts, and I'll just provide the Commission with the 
handout material.

Essentially, what I'd like to say is that the 
youth program section of the San Francisco Police 
Department involves a lot of programs that provide 
recreation, outdoor activity, cultural activity and 
mentoring programs, tutorial programs for youth throughout 
the City.

Last year, we served approximately 27,000 youth 
in San Francisco. We work very closely with the school 
district and with community-based organizations.

I'm also a member of the Youth and Education 
Committee of the Human Rights Commission. And what we 
have taken on as one of our agenda items is to look at 
vioence in the public school system.

That entails, right now, primarily collecting 
data from all the City agencies and community agencies, 
where we know the data is available. And hopefully, after 
we've collect that data and analyzed it, we will be able 
to submit a report for this Commission for the purposes of 
perhaps identifying some of the issues that are being 
addressed in this committee hearing.

The last point, I mean I could talk a lot about 
the justice system and police services, but I won't do 
that.
I would like to bring this booklet to the attention of the Commission. It's entitled, "Respect," a handbook created by youth and police of the city of Seattle.

It was a project that was -- actually involved the Seattle Youth Involvement Network and the Seattle Police Department.

And I think it's a good guide for, perhaps, addressing some of the issues that have been raised in this hearing. And that is issued of understanding individual rights, the levels of authority by the police.

And I think that if we looked at this particular booklet and perhaps, maybae tried to do something in San Francisco, I think it would be something well worth undertaking.

So, I'll submit this along with my other paperwork. Thank you very much. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you.

Melinda Mills, Senior Supervising Probation Officer, San Francisco Probation Services.

MELINDA MILLS

MS. MILLS: Hi, I'm Melinda Mills, Juvenile Probation. I will be very brief.

Our department deals with every child under the age of 18 who is arrested in the City and County of San
Francisco. We deal with some others, too. That's a brief description.

The good news is that statistically, .04 percent of those youth are identified as the population we are discussing tonight. Very few.

There may be more who, for a lot of reasons, do not want to identify in the juvenile justice context.

I think that probably it's a tribute to the services in the city that we are seeing fewer than we used to see.

The representative from the Department of Human Services indicated all of the programs that they have for these youth. And they also indicated that many of them are from out of county or out of the state.

We are not seeing very many of these youths in the juvenile system in San Francisco. And I think that's really wonderful news, because usually when we see them, it's for crimes that are of opportunity of need, for stealing, for prostitution, for means of staying alive.

So, I think that the City and County is to be commended for the services that are out there. Obviously, we will always need more.

What we do see, again, not too often but troublingly, is some youngsters involved in hate crimes. And I am going to be recommending to our new interim chief
that the department join in collaboration with CUAV to
provide counselling and educational services to those
young people who are found to have been involved in hate
crimes against this population. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Okay. Commissioner
Jaicks.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: Are you in a position to
recommend also sensitivity training for the police
themselves?

I know that Sergeant Jefferies serves on the
same subcommittee as I do, but I just wondered. I didn't
get a chance to ask him that question, but I --

MS. MILLS: I can recommend it for the juvenile
probation staff. Sergeant Jefferies would have to take
that back to his staff.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: I think he understands
my --

I really wanted to get it on the record is all.
We've been advocating that for quite a while.

Maybe the sergeant would like to comment on it.

SGT. JEFFRIES: I can introduce that very
quickly, Commissioner.

We have an officer in the department who has
been doing that training for quite a few years. I started
in the department 25 years ago. And quite honestly, at
that time, they were involved in sensitivity training.

Now, that's something that has to be continued through in-service training throughout an officer's career. And we have an officer doing that. In fact, she's now traveling around the nation helping other departments develop training programs in this area.

So, I think that we are probably ahead of most other departments. And if you want to get more details of that, I can provide it for the Commissioner later on.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: I just need it at some point.

And Sergeant Jefferies is a really quality human being. But I think at some point, the Commission, I hope would make another recommendation to the Police Department. We sent it to the Police Commissioner. That is with whom we should be dealing.

I'd just like the record to show that we still consider that -- some of us do anyway, a problem, and that we'd like to pursue it.

SGT. JEFFERIES: Okay.

CO-CHAIR COSTELLO-GOOD: Our next speaker is Judy Griffin, Director, San Francisco Juvenile Hall.

JUDY GRIFFIN

MS. GRIFFIN: Good evening, Commissioners. I will leave my written statement for you.
Very briefly, Ms. Mills referred to the youth we serve. Juvenile Hall only sees less than 50 percent of the total youth referred to the department. The majority of youth stay is less than three days.

Very few of the youth during that period, self identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender for a number of reasons. As referred to earlier, one of them is living in an institution setting is not easy for any adolescent, let alone someone who is seen by the other youth as a little different.

Your next speaker, Michael Baxter, will refer to the -- we rely on Michael's staff to provide the kinds of assistance for the youth who are in juvenile hall.

COMMISSIONER ROCHON: I have one question. I don't want to go away with it not addressed.

We had a speaker earlier this evening that spoke about being placed in a room by herself because she had identified as being lesbian, and special hours for taking showers. And this was in the San Francisco juvenile system.

I'd like to know what your knowledge is of issues like that happening. I hear that the numbers are very small, but for those that have identified, how are they treated and what kind of sensitivity is provided to them being in that institutional setting?
MS. GRIFFIN: Our youths are kept in rooms by themselves anyway, so that would not be necessarily singled out.

Not knowing the exact circumstances, there have been times that if any child for whatever reason, sometimes because of gang orientation, or something else, the staff feels that that child is in danger of harm by some of the other youth, some sort of special arrangements will be made for something around showers.

Without knowing the circumstance, that is what I could think of as perhaps a possibility.

COMMISSIONER ROCHON: So I am to understand that every youth in juvenile hall is kept in a single cell --

MS. GRIFFIN: Correct.

COMMISSIONER ROCHON: -- by themselves?

MS. GRIFFIN: Correct.

COMMISSIONER ROCHON: Thank you.

CO-CHAIR KHOUNSOMBATH: I'd like to welcome Michael Baxter, Assistant Director of Special Programs for Youth.

MICHAEL BAXTER

MR. BASTER: Good evening, Commissioners.

As just stated, my name is Michael Baxter, Assistant Director of Special Programs for Youth.
We are the largest youth program funded by the Department of Public Health. So we are a DPH program, working in a very unique relationship, I would say, with the juvenile justice system, and that we provide all of the health services to youth who are incarcerated.

Services to youth who are in detention has historically been SPY's largest program serving over 3,000 youths in 1995.

Few self-identified gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth, came forth however in this institutional setting.

I think as Judy was just talking about, I think in 1995 within our program, perhaps, five self-identified youth came out, which I calculate is 2/1000th of one percent, so we're talking about a very tiny number.

And I think that should bring us some questions as to, perhaps, why that is. And I think sort of homophobia -- institutional homophobia -- is unfortunately alive and well in San Francisco in 1996.

But there is some good news, I think. At the Youth Guidance Center and throughout the City, at least in part, on the part of SPY, staff and others have made progress in the treatment of queer youth in detention.

Twelve years ago, when I first started working
in this facility, I believe I was among the first to be out at YGC.

What has pushed a lot of people's buttons at that time, our agency, SPYU, today employs a number of proud lesbian and gay professionals who are out in that institution.

And I'd like to think that at least there is a notion that queer professionals are within the institution everywhere.

Also, twelve years ago when I first started working at that institution, there was a policy that all male youth who self-identified as gay were immediately housed on the maximum security unit. That was done for supposedly their best interest because on B-5 each of the rooms has a toilet and a sink. And so these youths could be sort of kept in their rooms 24-hours a day.

I'm happy to say that it didn't take too long for myself and some other people to get rid of that policy. So that's not happening today.

Today, youth are mainstreamed in juvenile hall. And if a youth presents with special issues or if there's real concern that perhaps being mainstreamed on the unit isn't going to be in their best interest, they are put on B-5. They are put on the receiving unit which is where -- it's a very small unit. There is maybe six kids there at
any given time. And they can get more special, positive attention, I think, if they need that.

I think SPY has made concerted efforts to outreach to lesbian and gay, transgender youth in detention. One of the ways that we do this is that every single kid coming into this institution gets a packet of information from our services.

Part of that packet includes information on how they can access people on my staff who are out and also referrals for when they leave the institution. So, we have a big thing on LYRIC so that when they leave they can do something on their own, as well.

I think also that gay and lesbian staff often use their professional roles as an opportunity to be positive role models, as well as taking on the role of educators for the majority of the youth and some staff who continue to demonstrate significant homophobic attitudes.

Educating in the classroom and to individuals and working with YGC administration to no longer tolerate homophobic policies or treatment of youth has made significant impact on the institution over the years.

Clearly, however, this does not mean that everything is A-okay at YGC. We believe that the following recommendations should be supported by you and this Commission, as well as the larger community for
continued improvements in terms of the treatment of queer youth at YGC.

I have three basic recommendations to make. The first is that all staff at YGC should have some sort of annual mandatory training; that I would really like to see some sort of institutionalized regular education of all youth by CUAV and other community agencies within this institution. And as Melinda mentioned, I feel very strongly that youth who are committed to YGC for hate crimes, that spy, would be very happy to work with probation and other community agencies to develop some specific intervention.

I know from my experience in the past as being a direct service provider that one of the things that I felt like I did best up there was to come out. It was often a very difficult position to be in in a classroom with 20 males who love to go through sort of this thing with me of asking me first, "Do you have any kids, Michael?" And I would say at that time -- although I have a six-year-old now, "no."

"Do you have girlfriend, Michael?" And I would say, "No."

Then, it would be finally they'd get to that question, "So what do you have, Michael?"

And in going through that and in sort of being
willing to say, "Yes, I'm a gay man. And I don't have a problem with that."

And then being able to spend a lot of time with some of those kids, that that was the best way that I ever saw that they really turned around their own homophobic ideas.

So, education is important. And I think education works. I think that's an institution that needs to see a lot more of it.

Thank you. Have a good night.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: And now I'd like to ask Maria Cora, who is a health educator with the Special Programs for Youth, and also thank you for staying here the entire evening. I'd like to acknowledge your presence and appreciate the fact that you stayed until the last to testify.

MARIA CORA

MS. CORA: I'd like to thank you for staying, also.

My name is Maria Cora. And for the last seven years I've provided health education services to the young women in detention at the Youth Guidance Center as part of my work with the Special Programs for Youth, which is part of the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

And Michael pretty much articulated the
recommendations I have, so I'm here mainly to illuminate a little bit on a personal basis for what that has been like.

In my capacity there, I have been privileged to have some young women come out to me as lesbians and bisexuals. And I acknowledged the difficulty that they face in this kind of disclosure, given the conditions of societal heterosexism and the added isolation and vulnerability of being a detainee.

I believe they chose to tell me because I am an out lesbian on my job. Several months ago, G-2, which is the name of the unit that houses the young women, experienced having four out-queer young women on the unit as detainees.

The staff on the unit were challenged to provide services and address many different issues. And the supervisor called me and asked for resources to assist in this process because they wanted to do it in a sensitive manner.

I called all the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youth serving agencies in the whole Bay Area and asked them for help, and they responded with written materials and with offers of help. And I passed all of this on to the staff at G-2.

That's just to say a little bit of what our
process is like up there, and to say that I support
heavily the furthering of education workshops, training,
queer sensitivity for everybody that works at Youth
Guidance Center. I think it will benefit all of us.
Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you very much. We
have completed this portion of the hearing. And I'm going
to move into the section that's for public comments, so
that anyone who has come here just to speak but was not on
the witness list should come forward now.

And I'll call on Tamara Ching.

TAMARA CHING

MR. CHING: Hi, my name is Tamara Ching,
T-a-m-a-r-a, C-h-i-n-g.

I don't come here to give you my bio nor do I
come here to do an info commercial about our agency or
what services I provide.

I come here today as a 47-year-old transsexual
mommy, and mommy to many queer children, lost to the
streets of San Francisco, my birth town. Transgender
youth thrown out or beat out of their homes, ridiculed out
of their education and given the heave-ho from their jobs.

I'm mommy to those who turn to drugs to ease the
pain of working the streets for survival. Those
AIDS-eaten indigent teenage youths that have to go out
there and die in the Tenderloin and die in the Ambassador Hotel or the New Pacific Hotel rather than going to a gay or a straight hospice to die in dignity.

I even am a mommy to the press people and all the different queer friendly people who -- and I'm urging you to go ahead and take what you heard, not from these agencies per se but from what the youths had to say.

This was their thing. I'm neither -- youth or not, but you should listen to what the youth have to say. And if you didn't get all the information this time, then you should have a survey and do it and go out there and get to the youth out there on the streets.

I will be closely watching what happens after tonight so I can tell my children and my kids out on the street what has been taking place tonight and what will be done.

I offer you the invitation, if you want to go out to see the kids on the street, my kids then come on down to the Tenderloin. You can get my phone number and contact me through Martha or Larry.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Okay. Thank you very much.

Is there anybody else who would like to give public comment?
If you could just state your name for the record, it would be great.

MICHAEL SPENCER

MR. SPENCER: Hi, my name is Michael Spencer. And I wish to thank the Commission for coming together here. It makes me proud, as a San Franciscan to see this Commission come together, that will have reverberating moments around the world.

Again, thank you.

I just wish to make a statement saying that we should take into consideration every youth that has come here and made a personal statement and take it to heart what has been said. As it has been said that it takes an entire village to raise a child, I think it takes the entire world to realize that every village should have equal representation for the queer children of the village, as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: We have one more comment.

Good evening, if you could state your name.

BRET VAN

BRET: Hi, my name is Brett. I am submitting a written proposal for recommendations of support for young adult -- a three-year recovery program.

I talked about this earlier. I just want to mention, I am 23 years old and I have 90 days clean and
sober.

And there are people, young adults, dying out on the streets from drug overdoses, from murder. I mean, it's not pretty out there, because many of them just can't find the services available. They can't come into adult programs. And you wouldn't believe the number of them out there that are gay and lesbian and are scared to death to come into a recovery program full of adults, straight adults, who don't even feel like they deserve a chance.

I'm 23. And I am the one who is actually trying to get this program together. The fact that the state and city is in the condition it's in, where this is not available, and it takes a 23-year-old, 90-days sober to actually get a program like this together bites, you know.

We need -- this is a need to be recognized. And we need a lot more support than we are getting out there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Did you have a comment?

LARRY TURNER

MR. TURNER: My name is Larry, Larry Turner.

There is one comment I want to make. I constantly hear about this is supposed to be for the new generation. But as I'm seeing -- and I'm also clean and sober; I have ten months clean and sober -- you know, I'm seeing a new generation go down the drain, left and right.
And I'm seeing my friends die, die because they are out there trying to survive on the streets.

They don't have -- you know, the programs are there but they are not advertised like I said, you know. Everybody is constantly saying this is for the new generation. This is for our kids. I'm a father, too. You know, my son did die.

And I'm, like, I reach out now because without the support from people like everybody that's been in here, the youth doesn't have a chance, you know. And the youth needs to know that there is people out there that do care. So thank you.

COMMISSIONER CHEY: I know there is a proposal that is being solicited right now. And it's called the California Wellness Foundation. It's supported by some health insurance. And they are trying set up ten centers in California, statewide. It's computers in the future. That is the proposal that you should write.

I think it would be a good idea if you have all this programs that you need, put that proposal in. They're going to provide $100,000 for five years. And it is for access.

And I think for this group of population they should have one access. And that is the future. You have to have a communication going on Internet. You have to
utilize technology.

Certainly there is more things to be done by the City, but I think the leadership that you have shown, you have to take action yourself. And if you need information about the proposal, I will share with you tomorrow. You can give me your phone number or fax number. You have to take some immediate action that can benefit you.

That is just my recommendation that comes to my mind.

MR. TURNER: I hear what you're saying. And I hear what everybody in here is saying.

I've been in the system, in the Juvenile Hall Court system. It didn't help me any.

I've been abused in the system. I've been raped in the system. And now my sisters are going into the system because they're being taken away from my mom. You know, I don't want that to happen, but right now I don't know what is to happen.

And the system didn't help me any. DSS didn't help me any. DSS sent me back home to an abusive family. I was raised on the streets. I've been on my own since I was ten years old. I'm only 22 years old. You know, not many people live on the streets and survive.

You know, I grew up way too quick. And the children out there don't have a life. They became an
adult too fast. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: I think that concludes all of our public testimony for tonight. I want to again acknowledge the wonderful commissioners that sat next to me, Kent and Jesse, who found out how long community hearings can be, but you were just wonderful, and I want to thank you for that.

I also want to acknowledge all the people who have been moving in and out and helping us, who are all members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Advisory Committee. And I can't name them all tonight, but we will enter their names into the record as a way of thanking them. And they've been great. And I appreciate that.

And, again, I appreciate the fact that all the commissioners who came here, both the Youth Commission and the Human Rights Commission and the Commissioners, who stayed throughout it. It's evidence of our intense commitment to lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender youth, and youth in general, and our commitment to the broad issues of homophobia, racism, sexism, and every ism that there is. We're trying to address that with this Human Rights Commission and this Youth Commission.

And finally, as I did before, thanks to the staff of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Unit,
Larry Brinkin, Cynthia Goldstein and Brian Cheu. You did a great, great job.

Okay. I think we're adjourning. We have a few more comments.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: I'd just like to, if we could, to adjourn in memory of the very first executive director of the Human Rights Commission, who died yesterday. His name is Frank Quinn. And he was one of the founders of the Human Rights Commission 30 years ago. And he was a wonderful human being.

And I would like for us to communicate that to his widow, if we could. And I would be glad to write whatever is appropriate for that and submit it to you and maybe you can pass it on. So if we can adjourn in his memory, I would appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER JAICKS: I would like to thank the court reporter, as well.

CHAIRPERSON KNUTZEN: Yes. Thank you to the court reporter.

And I also didn't ever mention Frank Anderson, who has been sitting here the entire evening. He's our Acting Director. So I want to especially thank him for participating.

/ / / / /
Is there anything else, any other comments by Commissioners or my fellows Co-Commissioners.

All right. Then, this hearing is adjourned.

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The Hearing concluded at ten o'clock

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