

Dear Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Associated Persons,

Yesterday I got a call. My brother was visiting from Maryland and my family was waking up to our last fantastic day of visiting with him before he headed back to his home. I had registered recently for the two big Young Friends gatherings of the summer, Sessions and Camp Onas. I'd received a mysterious email from our coordinator asking to call me before Sessions, and yesterday we made the call.

I was informed that Philadelphia Yearly Meeting had decided that if I were to attend Sessions or Onas I would not be allowed to sleep or use bathroom spaces with my gender. This is because I am transgender. I realized I am transgender at a Young Friends gathering. I accepted that I am transgender at a Young Friends gathering. I was supported as a transgender person at Young Friends gatherings. Now I was told that PYM no longer supported my being transgender at Young Friends gatherings.

In recent years the Young Friends have thoughtfully held the issues of our identities and intentional support of each other as we've learned to form our community. Out of this our Young Friends community realized we wanted to have a supportive and inclusive policy for our trans* members. Recently Young Friends reached out to PYM's Education Standing Committee to have a trans-inclusive policy created for Young Friends. This policy was "directed specifically toward the needs for being an inclusive community for Friends regardless of their gender identity."

I was surprised to hear the new policy and I feel it did exactly the opposite of the Young Friends' intentions. Instead of supporting me and other trans* members of our community, it actually harms us. This supposedly trans-inclusive policy completely shut out the needs of trans* members (like me) of the community, segregating all "intimate spaces" by biological gender. Were this policy to be carried out it would publicly humiliate and stigmatize all trans members of the community by treating us as our opposite gender.

I came to the Young Friends program with the intent of participating in and nurturing a program that was universally accepting and inherently Quaker. I understood that Philadelphia Yearly Meeting wished to uphold the long-standing tradition of acceptance and appreciation of youth that is Young Friends. Because of this recent change I no longer feel that PYM is providing the opportunity for the program to be inherently and fully accepting or even Quaker.

Many of us Young Friends come to the program relying on it to be our safe haven from the oppression and cruelties of our everyday lives. Many of us come to the program willing to realize and be open to aspects of ourselves we've never or rarely acknowledged. Many of us come because we need a place to be unquestionably loved. Stigmatizing any group or individual within our community doesn't just prevent the community from being this safe haven for those people, it goes against the fundamental Quaker principles which Young Friends is based off of.

Quakers believe that there is that of God in every person, and therefore are called to strive for worldwide, unrestricted equality before God. Since our beginning Quakers have often been seen in progressive and activist roles in society, such as Lucretia Mott organizing the Seneca Falls Convention. As we have worked in the past and will continue to work for women's rights, it is time also to turn our attention again to LGBTQ equality. This means accepting all walks of life and all genders, and creating communities inclusive to all--cisgendered, transgender, intersex, or off the gender binary entirely.

Throughout history, exclusion and discrimination against particular groups has been something Quakers have acknowledged as evil. Women, people of color, slaves, poor, gays, and now transgender people. This policy betrays that history, and I am calling on Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to revoke it and work towards something truly inclusive.

All the constituencies involved, as normal practice, should be involved in the actual policy making. Trans* youth and parents and the youth professionals who will implement the policy, such as Hannah Mayer and Kody Gabriel Hersh, especially should be allowed to impact the policy.

Before implementation of any policy changes that affect the Young Friends, policies should be given to and approved by the Young Friends program in some way.

~Samara J. B. A. Rockwood

Glossary:

Cisgender: Gender identity matches gender assigned at birth

Transgender: Gender identity does not match gender assigned at birth

Intersex: Ambiguous or both biological genders

Gender Identity: Gender identity is a person's subjective view of their own gender, sometimes the same or sometimes different than their biological sex--also known as assigned sex, for sex assigned at birth.