

YOUTH EQUALITY ALLIANCE

LIVING IN THE MARGINS UPDATE

2014-15



WHO WE ARE

Formed in 2013, the Youth Equality Alliance (YEA) is a statewide coalition of organizations, advocates and activists dedicated to improving the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. We do this through advocating for systemic policy changes to build safe and affirming spaces for all Maryland youth in education, juvenile justice, foster care and housing.

OUR WORK

In August 2014, YEA released *Living in the Margins*, a groundbreaking report on the experiences of Maryland LGBTQ youth in foster care, education and juvenile services. The report outlines the discrimination LGBTQ youth face in these systems, and details specific policy recommendations to create sustainable change.

Since the release of this report, the YEA Coalition has worked tirelessly to enact these policy recommendations. Within the last year we have accomplished a great deal.

OUR PROGRESS in

EDUCATION

Provided technical assistance to Maryland State Department of Education in the drafting of their Guide to Providing Supports to Transgender and Gender-Non Conforming Students

Developed a "Know Your Rights" card for LGBTQ students and disseminated materials to schools statewide

Facilitated trainings on building safe schools for LGBTQ youth to 400 education professionals in all 24 counties

Conducted 15 presentations to Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) in 8 counties

FOSTER CARE

Partnered with sister coalitions to successfully advocate for the creation of an ombudsman position with DHR

Partnered with the Child Welfare Leadership Academy to release a webinar on working with LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care that is now mandated training for foster care workers statewide

Trained all 17 Baltimore City Department of Social Services (DSS) Units in best practices for working with LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care

Provided a chapter on supporting LGBTQ youth to DSS' Youth in Care Handbook

Presented a Keynote speech at the statewide Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) Conference on the experiences of LGBTQ youth in care and their legal rights

& JUVENILE SERVICES

Facilitated formal presentation to the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) Advisory Board on *Living in the Margins*

MOVING FORWARD

YOUTH VOICES

YEA remains dedicated to building a coalition that is truly youth centered, and intersectional in its approach. While we are proud of YEA's accomplishments, we remain mindful of the sobering reality that the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 20.3% of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual high school students had been threatened or injured with a weapon such as a gun, knife or club on school property one or more times during the past 12 months, compared to 7.3% of their heterosexual counterparts¹. We realize addressing these issues demands building long lasting institutional change demands youth led policy advocacy work.

To this end, we are proud to report that the Open Society Institute has provided generous funding to help us launch a Youth Advisory Board (YAB). The YAB, which will be launched in Fall 2015, is a leadership opportunity for Baltimore City LGBTQ youth and allies to come together and advocate on policies that directly affect their lives.

Our commitment to youth voice will also be reflected on September 9th, when we host the first ever panel on the Needs of Maryland's LGBTQ Youth for the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Family for the Maryland State Legislature. We look forward to this opportunity to speak directly with lawmakers about the work of YEA, and ways we can partner together to build sustainable change that honors the intersecting identities of LGBTQ youth.

Given the reality that LGBTQ youth experience homelessness at disproportionately higher rates² compared to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts, YEA believed it was imperative to concretely articulate our dedication to advocacy around homelessness. In May 2015, our coalition moved to formally add homelessness to our mission statement, and create a workgroup to address the needs of this population.

OUR COALITION

15 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- > Advocates for Children and Youth
- > Baltimore Child Abuse Center
- > Center for Black Equity - Baltimore
- > Equality Maryland
- > The Frederick Center
- > FreeState Legal
- > Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network-Baltimore Chapter
- > Homeless Persons Representation Project
- > Honorary Nieces and Nephews
- > LGBT Health Resource Center at Chase Brexton
- > Lower Shore LGBT Coalition
- > Maryland Court Appointed Special Advocates
- > NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland
- > PFLAG - Howard Columbia Chapter
- > SMILE - Johns Hopkins
- > STAR TRACK Adolescent Health Program at the University of Maryland School of Medicine

5 INDIVIDUAL ADVOCATES

- > Eva Fury
- > Lynne Muller
- > Irene Burks
- > Itta Englander
- > Rhonda Lipkin

¹ 2014 National Transgender Discrimination Survey

² Youth Equality Alliance, "Living in the Margins: A Report on the Challenges of LGBTQ Youth in Maryland Education, Foster Care, and Juvenile Justice Systems" 2014, Baltimore: FreeState Legal Project