
Spahrkle

The Monthly Newsletter of
The Spahr Center

May 2019

The Spahr Center Opposes Trump Attacks on LGBTQ Health Care



Within the past month, the Federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has announced two major steps to deny health care access to LGBTQ people, people living with and affected by HIV, and women seeking family planning services.

The first attack is a new federal rule, imposed on May 3, allowing healthcare providers to cite their religious beliefs and moral convictions as a reason to refuse services to certain patients. This shocking decision means that doctors can deny care to LGBTQ people, people living with and affected by HIV, refuse gender affirming treatments for transgender people and withhold birth control and family planning services. This Trump rule is a blatant attack on LGBTQ people, people with HIV/AIDS, and women. It was not created to protect religious freedoms – but rather to justify blatant discrimination. It is promulgated by a pro-life president who hypocritically suggests that some lives are less than worthy. It is clear that the denial of medical treatment for people, many of whom already receive inadequate health care, can have deadly impacts and is completely unacceptable. Fortunately, numerous entities have filed suit to reverse this rule, but whether and when it may be overturned is unknowable.

The second attack is a rule proposed on May 24 by HHS seeking to substantially change the Affordable Care Act, which currently prohibits discrimination in health care in the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age and disability. Under President Obama, HHS issued rules including gender identity under the definition of sex. Now, the

director of the HHS Office for Civil Rights says that the proposed rule will define discrimination on the basis of sex as referring more simply to gender. Doing so will permit health care insurers and health care providers to legally deny gender reassignment and other essential health care services to transgender people. Advocates also fear that the newly proposed rule change will also discriminate against LGBTQ people seeking health insurance and services. The rule change proposed on May 24 is open for public comment for 60 days before a final decision is made about its implementation.

The Spahr Center will continue to participate in the fight for comprehensive, affirming care for all people in Marin County. We are currently taking the following actions:

- Joining other advocates in submitting comments in opposition to the rule proposed on May 24.
- Assembling a task force to ensure that health insurers in California and medical providers in Marin County continue to be committed to providing equitable medical care to LGBTQ people, people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and women seeking family planning services;
- Offering trainings and consulting to medical providers wishing to reinforce their knowledge about LGBTQ-affirming medical care;
- Creating a list of affirming medical providers and providers who identify as LGBTQ;
- Developing a comprehensive guide for transgender people seeking medical treatment and legal affirmation of their identity, as well as offering support while navigating the process.

Here is how you can take action in solidarity with us:

- Join our task force. Contact Fel Agrelius for more information: agrelius@thespahrcenter.org;
- Tell us if a medical provider denies you care;
- If you have a doctor who specializes in treating LGBTQ clients or people with HIV/AIDS, or identifies as LGBTQ, let us know! We want to share this information with our community

We will not allow hate to prevent people from accessing medical care in Marin County. The Spahr Center stands against the Trump administration's homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and bigotry.

Let us unite as a community against hate!

Beating the Stigma Of HIV

Bri Silva, Executive Asst.

Robert Shea, Jr. liked being in his body and feeling the breeze. He said so himself. Looking back at his life, being on his skateboard must have been freedom. He said he liked the views too. He said he liked where he was living. For an adolescent his appreciation was rare. Or was it?

When speaking of Robert, it's important to acknowledge two things. One, he was born in 1990 into Generation Y; and two, the stigma surrounding people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) was at a fever pitch. People were still saying things like "the epidemic was prescribed by



God for sin,” and pictures of wasted, crumbling bodies, bodies falling in on themselves like abandoned buildings, were everywhere in the media. People were scared, a whole generation terrified, and in attempts to distance themselves from the scary reality, they grew belief systems about HIV and AIDS. And about the people who were infected with it.

If you look up the definition of Stigma, you get: ‘A mark of disgrace or infamy; a stain or reproach, as on one’s reputation.’ But that doesn’t sound like the voice of Teresa’s son. It’s not at all indicative of the life he lived.

How much fear, if any, lived in Robert Shea, Jr’s body alongside the HIV - which was kept at a low level with the aid of a newer generation of antiretrovirals - no one can know. And now that Robert has passed away, there’s nothing more he can tell us.

Some factors contributing to the stigma associated with HIV are fear of transmission, fear of suffering and death, fear of being a burden on family, fear of limited or no access to antiretrovirals, and fear of vulnerability in the face of a discriminatory society. PLWHA, even now, nearly thirty years after Robert Shea, Jr. was born HIV positive, feel the need to protect themselves. Not only are they threatened internally, but the external world works against them through antiquated belief systems - some of which reared their ugly heads well before they were even born.

Robert Shea, Jr. wasn’t expected to live past three years old. He was twenty-six when he died from an opportunistic cancer. He was, and still is, Teresa’s son. “I am strong and healthy,” starts his poem. “I wonder why there are so many stars in the sky . . .”

PLWHA, and those of us working to mitigate their financial and social pressures, know that the stigma that was at a fever pitch in the 90’s remains present and insidious. It prevents people from being tested for HIV, and from accessing treatment and long-term care. Stigma lurks every point along the HIV care continuum. Stigma lay in wait for Robert; waited for the romance of his life that began when he was a Senior in High School and lasted until he was twenty-two. Once, the mother of Robert’s girlfriend slapped him for kissing her daughter. Violence born from stigma. It’s sadly accurate to say that the greatest barrier to the well-being of PLWHA, the one with the most force, is sociocultural. It’s not medical, anymore. It isn’t even financial. How can we explain that after 38 years of experience with this epidemic?

Variations of stigma and discrimination - it active partner - exist. Increased access to care and treatment function to relieve HIV stigma, but they are not enough. Education and advocacy are the keys to breaking down stigma. There’s a quote whose author I don’t remember, but it has stayed with me. It says, “Information is light. Information itself, about anything, is light.”

Teresa says about her son, “He put himself out there for everyone to see.” I see that in his poetry, which pans back, signifying that identity is a choice. “I see things at a 360-degree point of view/I want to be noticed for who I am.” His poem gets to the place society is going. It brings us there. “I understand that I can live with what I have/I say that if you really believe in something, it can happen.” He points out how hard it is to untangle his identity, although it shouldn’t be. “I am strong and healthy” he repeats. “That’s just who I am . . .”

We need effective strategies to reduce and dismantle the stigma that shrouds the lives of PLWHA. We need care and treatment resources scaled up in settings that are most heavily impacted by the HIV epidemic. We need to create a world that works to replace stigma and fear with compassion and service.

**I am strong and healthy
I wonder why there are so many stars in the sky
I hear only what I want to hear
I see things at a 360-degree point of view
I want to be noticed for who I am**

I am strong and healthy
I pretend adolescence is a game
I feel the inner strength of loved ones
I touch the kind hearts around me
I worry that life is a failure
I cry when I think

I am strong and healthy
I understand that I can live with what I have
I say that if you really believe something, it can happen
I dream that someday there will be a cure
I try really hard to be a good friend
I hope my dad's dreams come true

I am strong and healthy

That's just who I am

By Robert Shea Jr.

The Spahr Center Creates the Senior Program Fund – And the Challenge is ON!

The Spahr Center has announced the formation of a Senior Program Fund exclusively in support of its senior services and social activities. Individuals who contribute to this Fund can be 100% certain that their donations will only be used for senior programs. This includes the **\$36,000** cost of staff working on senior programs; senior program expenses like food, meeting space and supplies; and a small share of the cost of operating The Spahr Center – office rent, phones, fundraising and accounting. With time, the Fund can make it possible to add additional programs and activities.

We are also thrilled to announce that Dennis Elder and Bill Otton, and Julie Beach, have made two **\$1,000** challenge grants, and Bill Jones has made a **\$500** challenge grant to encourage donations to The Senior Program Fund by June 30, 2019. We don't want to have to return these extremely generous contributions, so do make your own gift today!

Individuals wishing to donate to the Senior Program Fund can do it in two ways. If you mail a check to The Spahr Center (150 Nellen Avenue, Corte Madera, 94925), attach a note that says that your donation is for the Senior Program Fund, or note that in the memo line of your check. If you make a donation through The Spahr Center website, you will have an opportunity to 'Dedicate' your contribution. Type in 'Senior Program Fund'.

Finally, The Spahr Center welcomes individuals to consider it in their estate planning. Bequests from generous individuals have been instrumental in assuring the sustainability of all of our services. For help to think about how to include The Spahr Center in your plans, get in touch with Dana Van Gorder at 415.886.8551

A Report on The Spahr Center's Senior Town Hall

Julie Beach, Senior Advisory Committee member

The LGBTQ+ Senior Town Hall meeting, held in Corte Madera on April 25th, 2019, was a lively and passionate discussion about the needs of Marin's LGBTQ+ seniors. During the

meeting, Interim Executive Director Dana Van Gorder, Spahr Board President Whitney Hoyt, and members of Spahr's staff conveyed their clear commitment to LGBTQ+ senior programs in Marin County.

During the meeting, Spahr Center representatives also reported out on LGBTQ+ senior-focused news.

- Both the Novato and the Corte Madera LGBTQ+Q discussion gatherings are ongoing. Group Facilitators are Gary "Buz" Hermes in Corte Madera and Nancy Flaxman in Novato. The groups encourage LGBTQ+ seniors to socialize and share vital information under a backdrop of engaging topics and honest discussion.
- Accounting reports will allow donations to be earmarked for LGBTQ+ senior programs. Additionally, reports will clearly state income and expenses for senior-focused programming.
- The Spahr Center LGBTQ+ Senior Advisory Council (SAC) has been officially revitalized. Board of Directors (BOD) Member and former Board President Marshall Grimes will serve as SAC's liaison to the BOD.
- Lastly, fund-raising consultant Sherrie Holmes will work with Spahr Center staff and Board to develop an actionable fundraising plan so that The Spahr Center can continue serving Marin LGBTQ+ into the future.

SAC members are ad-hoc LGBTQ+ senior Marin residents: Anders Withers, Cara Bennett, Cynthia Cobaugh, Jerry Schmitz, Julie Beach and Will Boemer. Contact: sac2019@comcast.net. Together we can make sure Marin's LGBTQ+ seniors are thriving. Get involved! Ask us how.

We Hit the Road for LGBTQ+ Advocacy Day in Sacramento!

Fel Agrelius – Youth Program Coordinator



On May 14th, members of the Youth Advisory Committee and I traveled in Sacramento for LGBTQ+ Capitol Advocacy Day. We were part of an effort by over a hundred individuals from across California to advance legislation that supports LGBTQ+ people and people with HIV/AIDS. Our group met with three legislative offices, including our own representative, Assembly Member Marc Levine.

The event was organized by Equality California, which is an amazing organization that has staff members working full time in Sacramento to fight for our community. They compiled a comprehensive resource packet on all of the legislation related to LGBTQ+ people, as well as a scorecard on which legislators supported what legislation. They separated advocates into groups of 5 or 6 and each group focused on a different group of legislation. Participants could focus on mental health equity, HIV/AIDS support and getting to zero, youth and school issues, transgender equity, or criminal justice system reform.

The Spahr Center youth advisory committee focused on transgender equity. Our biggest priority was AB 132, the Transgender Respect, Agency, and Dignity Act. AB 132 proposed a major shift in the way the criminal justice system treats transgender people. Currently, incarcerated trans people must have undergone bottom surgery in order to be housed in the prison aligning with their gender identity. Even if they had legal documentation of their gender, the prison system only cared that they had gone through the intensive and expensive surgery to change their genitals. Bottom surgery is not something accessible to all transgender people - especially low-income people at risk for going to prison -and many simply do not want to go through it.

This represents an antiquated understanding of what it means to be transgender, by equating someone's gender to what's below the belt. The logic assumes that someone is truly trans only when they've significantly changed their body--ignoring that someone might have jumped through

many bureaucratic hoops already to change their birth certificate, driver's license, and other documentation to prove their gender to the government.

The impacts of transgender women being housed with men, in particular, are devastating. Prisons are already inherently unsafe for all people, but trans women in prisons have reported a constant atmosphere of coercion, sexual assault, and harassment. Thus, this legislation attempts to make prisons one degree safer by allowing transgender people to state what gender prison they need to be housed in. It also would require their chosen names and pronouns to be used at all times, by prison staff, on all documentation, and by inmates. This decreases some of the trauma of prisons, because transgender people are at least being acknowledged to be who they really, rather than held to name and gender they were assigned at birth.

The Youth Advisory Committee and I met with three legislative offices, and thankfully, two had already confirmed their support for this legislation, and all the other bills EQCA was advocating for that day. It was helpful for us to highlight the importance of AB 132 in particular, though, to encourage them to support their fellow legislators to prioritize and support the bill.



Ultimately, our day at the capitol was very fruitful. We were able to speak up for our community and our needs, get experience meeting with lawmakers, and be inspired by our fellow queer and transgender community and the activism happening around the state. We look forward to converging on the capitol again next year!

Favorable Supreme Court Decision Regarding Use of Bathrooms by Transgender Students

As *Spahrkle* went to press, the US Supreme Court upheld without comment a Pennsylvania's school district's policy allowing some transgender students to use bathrooms that match their gender identity. Plaintiffs in the case were students who argued that allowing use of bathrooms by transgender people violates their privacy rights and constitutes sexual harassment in violation of Title IX, the federal law barring discrimination based on sex in educational institutions that receive federal funds.

Lawyers for the school district say they made the decision to allow transgender students to use facilities that aligned with their gender identity because the district "Believes that transgender students should have the right to use school bathroom and locker facilities on the same basis as non-transgender students." A lower court declined to issue a preliminary injunction blocking the policy.

During President Obama's tenure, the Departments of Education and Justice issued guidance to school districts recommending that schools allow transgender students to use bathrooms and locker rooms that matched their gender identity. The Trump administration, however has withdrawn that guidance. Today's Supreme Court action comes as a welcome surprise from a body that appears to have become more conservative after two appointments of Justices by Trump.

LGBTQ Senior Luncheon

Thank you to everyone who came out on May 15th for our LGBTQ+ Senior Luncheon! The afternoon was a wonderful success.

BUDWING's Building banks didn't do too shabbily either! You all donated a total of **\$155.80** to the banks, and after Wing *doubled* or *tripled* the amount given by all you wonderful people, the total donation made to The Spahr Center was **\$605.20!**

We hope you will all join us for our Pride Picnic on June 22nd in Piper Park. We will have our next LGBT Senior Luncheon in late August, so have a fantastic summer!!

The Spahr Center's Syringe Exchange Program Saves Lives

Rhiannon Saltzman, Syringe Access Program Manager

Almost everyone struggles with some form of substance abuse, with the big difference being which substances people believe are socially acceptable. Food is a substance if you abuse it. I'm literally stress-eating a ham and cheese croissant as I'm writing this. But I know that if I need to go on a diet, I will have countless support options to do so. Can you imagine how different people's lives would be if there were commercials on TV, articles in magazines, and even "diet" pills available over-the-counter that helped with opioid addiction? Reducing the stigma of these drugs would remove countless treatment obstacles for those who use them.

At The Spahr Center, we accept that illicit drug use is part of our world, and choose to work to minimize its harmful effects. Ignoring or condemning drug users harms everyone and heals no one. Instead, we provide non-judgmental services and resources to people who use drugs in order to assist them in reducing attendant harm. It's not up to us to decide the value of a person based on their substance of choice. We value everyone, and strongly believe it is our duty to keep our community healthy and safe.



Syringe exchange programs have been proven to substantially reduce new HIV and hepatitis C infections without increasing drug use. They also provide a solid opportunity to link injection drug users (IDU) to health care services and substance use treatment. The Spahr Center's long running syringe access program is designed to meet people who use drugs "where they're at." And now, we've gone mobile! We have services

operating at Marin Community Clinics at 3240 Kerner Blvd and in our SUV in three locations in Marin County. Our services encourage a spectrum of strategies from safer use to reduce infections, overdose prevention and reversal to prevent deaths, and referrals for medically assisted treatment that can lead to the goal of total abstinence. Our program also distributes Narcan (Naloxone) to prevent opioid related overdoses. In 2018, we received reports from 16 people that the Narcan we provided them prevented them from overdosing, and perhaps from dying.

The Spahr Center is actively looking for volunteers to staff our syringe exchange locations, provide outreach and meet the growing demands of substance use head on. Two or three hours a week of your time is all we are asking for, in addition to your agreement with the principles of Harm Reduction that help our community reduce drug related harm. Together, we can move away from the stigma of illicit drug use and towards safer use and a healthier community. Please join us in this lifesaving work.

If you would like to volunteer with The Spahr Center's mobile syringe exchange to help save

Welcome to our Board of Directors, Suzanne Ford!

We are honored and excited to announce a great new addition to the membership of The Spahr Center's Board of Directors. Elected this May, Suzanne Ford is a fierce activist working toward equal rights for the Trans community. She is employed as a Regional Sales Manager at Revere Packaging, being named by Plastic News as one of Women Breaking the Mold in the Packaging Industry in 2017. Suzanne is also a board member of SF Pride, and was elected as its current Treasurer. She also serves on the Board of Trans Heartline. Suzanne lives in the SF Bay area with her wife Beverly and son, Daniel. She is available to speak to groups or employers about trans issues and her experience facing the world as a trans woman. We know that Suzanne will help to assure that The Spahr Center is a powerful advocate for and provider to the transgender community. Welcome, Suzanne!

Support Groups

The Spahr Center offers a variety of social support groups. Below is a list of the groups, with a short description. Please click any of the groups to learn more!

HIV Groups

- [Latino Support Group](#) - this group is for Latinos living with or affected by HIV.
- [Women's Support Group](#) - this group is for women living with or affected by HIV.
- [Long Term Survivors Group](#) - this group is for any individual who identifies as a "long-term survivor" of HIV.

LGBTQ Groups

- [Parent Groups](#) - these groups are for parents/caregivers of gender expansive and/or questioning youth
- [Youth Drop-in Groups](#) - these groups are for any LGBTQ youth
- [Senior Discussion Groups](#) - these are facilitated discussion groups for LGBTQ identified adults of any age.
- [Men's Brown Bag Lunch](#) - this is a casual discussion group for men that meet for lunch and discussion.

[Donate Now!](#)

[Join us for Our Pride Picnic on June 22](#)

THE SPAHR CENTER PRESENTS...

LGBTQ PRIDE

June 22nd
12pm - 3pm
Piper Park
in Larkspur
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OF LGBTQ+
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Free Lunch!
Art Projects!
Raffle Prizes!
Bounce House!

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Come join us and show your PRIDE! The event is free but we don't want to run out of anything so please let us know you're coming by registering [here](#)

Until Next Time.. Spahrkle!

The Spahr Center | 415-457-2487 | 150 Nellen Ave, Suite 100



