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Officials Urge Boy Scout Councils to Defy Leadership on Gay Issue

By THOMAS J. LUECK

A day after a Manhattan school district withdrew its support for the Boy Scouts of America over its exclusion of gays, officials in New York City and at a major charity in Westchester and Putnam Counties intensified the pressure on scout officials to defy the parent organization.

Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani told reporters at City Hall yesterday that the local council of scouts had assured the city schools chancellor in a letter that "the Boy Scouts in the New York City area do not discriminate with regard to membership or with regard to scoutmasters."

And Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy later said he had received a "very positive" letter from the New York City Council of the Boy Scouts of America on Monday in which the local council pledged not to discriminate against gays.

Mr. Levy refused a request to release the text of the letter, and said he had been unable to reach executives of the local scout council by telephone since receiving it.

But the local scout officials said last night that the letter referred only to an in-school program that is a

The city's Board of Education may forbid the Scouts to use school buildings.

subsidiary of the national group and is separate from the traditional activities of Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts.

In June, the Supreme Court upheld a Scout policy forbidding gay adults to be scoutmasters and excluding them from other leadership roles. The decision has prompted schools and charitable groups around the country to re-evaluate their relationship with the Boy Scouts of America.

Patrick Stalwart, a spokesman for the New York scout council, said his letter to Mr. Levy had concerned the in-school program called Learning for Life. He said the program, open to boys and girls, enlists public school teachers to teach children things like how to balance a checkbook or prepare for a job interview. Mr. Stalwart said that 80 percent of

the 148,000 children who are members of the New York Council of the Boy Scouts are enrolled in Learning for Life.

He said the instructors who participate in Learning for Life are not affected by the Boy Scouts' policies toward gays because they are school employees.

But Mr. Stalwart added that New York City Scout officials had no intention of breaking with national Scout policies on gay adults who are leaders of Scout troops, or who wish to be.

"Any leader for any Boy Scout activity that engages in inappropriate activity will be asked to resign," Mr. Stalwart said.

Sunny Mindel, a spokesman for the mayor, said last night he could not be reached for further comment. Mr. Levy also could not be reached last night.

Mr. Levy said earlier yesterday that if a formal nondiscrimination policy could not be obtained from Scout leaders, the Board of Education could invalidate contracts that let the Boy Scouts use school buildings for meetings and recruiting.

Also yesterday, the United Way of

Westchester and Putnam Counties said it would end its financial support for all but one minor scouting program at the end of the year because of the Boy Scouts policy on gays. The decision would deny the Boy Scout Council for the two counties \$150,000 in financing each year, 7 percent of its \$2 million budget.

But like other independent United Way chapters that have made the same move, including those in Boston and Philadelphia, they will continue to donate to Learning for Life. The amount of money that will go to the Learning for Life program has yet to be determined, said Ralph Gregory, president of United Way of Westchester and Putnam.

On Tuesday, Community School District 2 in Manhattan voted to deny the Boy Scouts "special privileges, access or recruitment opportunities" that are not offered to other groups.

The decision, which Mr. Levy said he was reviewing and could overturn, would deny Boy Scout troops the use of school names on their uniforms, but largely symbolic because only one scout troops meets in a school controlled by the district,

and will be allowed to continue meeting there under a Board of Education open-access policy.

Mr. Levy said he had corresponded with the local council since the Supreme Court decision in June, laying out what he described as "a policy in this city, and the policy that the Board of Education has in place," which prohibits discrimination against gays.

The chancellor said his most recent correspondence from the New York City Boy Scout Council had been dated Sept. 13.

"I've gotten a letter from them which I think is very positive, and I just want to talk to the Boy Scouts directly and make sure I am reading it right and I am comfortable that they're doing what the need to," he said.

Mr. Levy said he expected to speak with scout officials this week, and report to the Board of Education by early next week.

"The Boy Scouts need to comply with their obligation to the City of New York, which is not to discriminate," he said. "And if we can keep the Boy Scouts thriving and supported, that's a good thing."