



February 23, 2020

CenterLink was founded in 1994 as a member-based coalition to support the development of strong, sustainable LGBTQ+ community centers. Serving over 250 LGBTQ+ community centers across the country in 45 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, CenterLink assists newly forming community centers and helps strengthen existing LGBTQ+ centers, through networking opportunities for center leaders, peer-based technical assistance and training, and a variety of capacity building services. LGBTQ+ community centers serve over two million people annually. Whether they provide direct services, educate the public or organize for social change, community centers work more closely with their LGBTQ+ constituency and engage more community leaders and decision-makers than any other LGBTQ+ network in the country.

CenterLink acts as a voice for LGBTQ+ community centers in national grassroots organizing in order to strengthen and build a unified center movement. We oppose the Trump administration's recently proposed faith-based regulations. They will roll back religious freedom protections for individuals seeking government-funded social services in many ways, from striking the requirement that beneficiaries be referred to an alternative provider to encouraging providers to seek religious exemptions from program requirements.

Those in need should never be faced with the stark choice between accessing the services they need or retaining their religious freedom protections, identity, or other rights. Religious freedom rules like the ones recently proposed could lead to beneficiaries not getting the services they need, sending more people to their local LGBTQ+ community center to seek out those same services or being unable to get the help they so desperately need. According to the most recent LGBT Community Center Report, half of LGBTQ+ community centers are thinly staffed: 25% have no paid staff and rely solely on volunteers, and 32% have between one and five paid staff. By allowing other organizations a license to discriminate based on their religious beliefs, centers could be challenged to provide timely services to everyone who comes through their doors.

Here are just a few examples of how LGBTQ+ community centers and the people they serve could be impacted by religious liberty rules:

- Local food distribution agencies or soup kitchens could try to deny services to vulnerable populations such as the LGBTQ+ community, putting strain on the LGBTQ+ community centers who operate food pantries.
- An organization receiving funds under the Older Americans Act to operate spousal and caregiver support groups could refuse to recognize a same-sex spouse.
- A young adult seeking Transitional Living for Homeless Youth program services like a bed, educational opportunities, or job training might be denied services from a faith-based provider, leaving them on the streets and vulnerable to attacks.



- A transgender woman could risk being turned away from a woman's emergency shelter or a same-sex couple could be refused family housing at a HUD-funded provider, leaving them without accommodations.
- Individuals or families dealing with a mental health condition, substance use disorder, HIV/AIDS, or homelessness seeking community living or case management could be turned away from receiving these services from a faith-based provider placing them in danger of rapidly deteriorating health.
- And in the many areas across the country without any access or connection to an LGBTQ+ center, all of the examples above could have disastrous effects for the health and well-being of individuals just because a provider uses religion as a reason to turn someone away due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Freedom of religion is important, and it means that we all have a right to our religious beliefs. But that does not give people the right to use their religion to discriminate against and/or impose those beliefs on others who do not share them.

Sincerely,

Denise Spivak
Interim CEO
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers