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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Clarke

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Informational Hearing - Providing Cultural Competence Training to Homeless Services Providers to Assist Them in Serving Homeless LGBTQ Youths
FOR the purpose of inviting homeless services providers and advocates for LGBTQ youths to appear before the City Council to discuss how cultural competence training on the needs of these youths can be broadly provided to service agencies to assist them in helping Baltimore's vulnerable population of homeless LGBTQ young people.

Recitals

Nationwide, an estimated 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ▲identified. Homeless and unstably housed LGBTQ youth, many of whom are people of color, are often subject to multiple forms of discrimination. As many as 50 percent of LGBTQ teens and young adults are rejected from their families, and of these 26 percent are explicitly told to leave home due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Far too many of these pushed out young people are left without any other options for shelter and protection and end up on the streets.

The struggle continues in the form of lack of acceptance, harassment, and even violence in the street as well as in emergency shelters, perpetuated by staff members and residents alike. This echo of their families rejection leads many LGBTQ youth to avoid shelters as much as possible; queer teens and young adults may instead stay at friends houses or participate in sex work with the possibility of spending the night at a client s home. Because of this they miss opportunities to get connected to resources that they need and which may be available. In the city of Baltimore, where at least 3,000 people experience homelessness on any given night, there is an urgent need for support and understanding for this large and vulnerable population.

Unable to find safe spaces at home or in shelters, these youth feel that they have to do whatever it

takes to survive on the streets, leaving them far more vulnerable to arrest and incarceration. According to the Youth Equality Alliance:

"A national study found that 39% of homeless LGBTQ youth have been involved in the juvenile justice system. A recent longitudinal study conducted in the Midwest found that LGBTQ youth are twice as likely to be detained in juvenile facilities for running away from home or from their foster care placements. Homeless LGBTQ youth risk being arrested for crimes that are a direct result of homelessness, such as curfew violations and loitering, or "survival crimes" such as shoplifting or prostitution. While living in the streets, these youth are more likely to be detained in police sweeps and arrested for unpaid fines or outstanding warrants."

And once in the hands of the juvenile justice system homeless LGBTQ youth often do poorly. They risk the permeant stigma of criminal convictions if charged as adults and are cut off from the supportive services that they may need. Worse, in a national survey of juvenile justice professionals, 80% cited physical safety as being a critical problem for LGBTQ youth.

This cycle of victimization and narrowing opportunity can be short circuited if shelters and homeless services providers can present themselves as more welcoming to endangered homeless LGBTQ youth. When providers offer appropriate, affirming placements and services, and treat LGBTQ youth with respect, these youth are more likely to engage with them and benefit from the resources that they can provide.

In many instances the inability of providers to communicate effectively with LGBTQ youths or meet their particular needs is inadvertent, a product of misunderstanding rather than malice. Cultural competence training in the needs of LGBTQ youths could greatly improve the ability of these providers to reach this especially vulnerable population.

Cultural competence training is a widespread tool used to equip service providers and professionals with a critical analysis and understanding of the various populations that they may serve. LGBTQ cultural competence training specifically seeks to equip providers with a deeper knowledge, understanding, and increased ability to provide effective services, create safer spaces, and build trust and rapport with clients and consumers who may identify as LGBTQ.

Basic components of cultural competence training involve unpacking one's own cultural worldview, biases, and prejudices, and attaining new knowledge of language, terminology, and the life experiences of different communities. Typically done in workshop style settings, training can consist of a wide variety of activities – including PowerPoint lectures, small group discussions, individual and organizational belief assessments and values clarifications, analysis of service provision, and testimonials directly from LGBTQ community members.

If done effectively and taken seriously, a few of these sessions can significantly impact a service provider's ability to assist LGBTQ youth. If done systematically throughout Baltimore's network of homeless services providers, cultural competence training could dramatically alter the accessibility of these services for this vulnerable population and reshape countless lives for the better.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Council invites homeless services providers and advocates for LGBTQ youths to appear before it to

discuss how cultural competence training on the needs of these youths can be broadly provided to service agencies to assist them in helping Baltimore's vulnerable population of homeless LGBTQ young people.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Human Services, the Executive Director of the Journey Home, the Health Commissioner, the President and CEO of Health Care for the Homeless, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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