

Federal aging report includes LGBT elders

Historic achievement marks a milestone in the fight for the rights of LGBT elders

by Roberta Sklar

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The long-awaited "Final Report of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging" (WHCoA), released by the Administration on Aging, marks a milestone in the fight for the rights of LGBT elders. Months of intensive organizing, including town hall meetings held around the country and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) convening its "Make Room for All" diversity summit last December — a counterpoint to the WHCoA — have paid off in the explicit inclusion of LGBT elders in the report.

Resolution 34, for example, includes the following implementation strategy: "Expand the definition of minority popula-

tions to include — gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders and seniors with disabilities and increase federal funding to the National Institute of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Title 3 and other federal agencies to reduce health disparities and promote health promotion programming for all minority populations."



As a result of inclusion in the federal aging report, the LGBT senior community is recognized as a minority that can benefit from increased federal funds for healthcare.

LGBT elders and their advocates converged on the nation's capital last December for "Make Room for All: A National Summit and Hearing on the Recommended Priorities for the WHCoA: Diversity, Cultural Competency and Discrimination in an Aging America." Sponsored by NGLTF, the event highlighted the growing diversity of the country's aging population, as well as the challenges

that diversity presents to policymakers and service providers.

"Make Room for All," essentially a counter summit to the WHCoA, was backed by

Services and Advocacy for LGBT Elders (SAGE); the American Society on Aging and its constituency groups, the Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network and the Network on Multicultural Aging; National Association on HIV Over Fifty; Older Women's League; and Griot Circle, among others.

Elder advocates also challenged the WHCoA at a Dec. 13 press conference for refusing to include sexual orientation, gender identity and other vulnerable populations in its resolutions. In addition, critics — including WHCoA delegates — had said rigid conference procedures and vague resolutions were preventing substantive discussion of critical aging issues, such as improving the cultural competency of service providers, providing adequate funding for the implementation of elder care services, and bolstering the economic security of a diverse aging population.

As co-founders of the Diversity in Aging Coalition, SAGE and NGLTF are building a network of support among those advocating policies that reflect the diverse experiences of our nation's seniors.

"Our community refuses to sit on the sidelines and watch our needs go ignored," said Amber Hollibaugh, a senior strategist for NGLTF and one of the nation's premier specialists on LGBT aging issues. "Our community's inclusion in this final report reflects this unwavering principle." ▀

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