

Why Welfare is a Queer Issue

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Queer Law 2000: Current Issues in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Law

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Session 3, Room 218

Panelists (in order):

Joseph DeFilippis, moderator

Ricky Blum

Barbara Ann Perina

Questions from Audience

JOSEPH DEFILIPPIS: My name is Joseph DeFilippis. I am the director of Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE) / Queens, which is an organization in Queens that serves lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender senior citizens. I am also one of the coordinators of a recently developed network of organizations that are both queer and welfare advocates or poverty rights advocates working together to examine the topic we are talking about today.

I want to introduce the other two panelists. This is Ricky Blum, who is a staff attorney with Legal Aid Society, and Barbara Ann Perina, who is the director of the LAMBDA Treatment and Recovery Program.

The first thing I want to do is talk a little about how this coalition got formed and some of the concerns that we seek to address. When the Personal Responsibility Act (which was basically welfare reform) happened, there was a lot of language going on about poor people during that time that was very similar to the language that we use to talk about queer people. I, as a queer person who is concerned about poverty issues, started documenting it, because I was in grad school getting my masters in Social Work, and because I had to do some thesis on something. The parallels between the strategies of the right wing and how they attack queer people and how they attack poor people, are very, very strong.

I just want to talk briefly to provide a framework for what we are going to be talking about today, because I am often asked "Why is welfare reform a queer issue?" I want to say, "It is a queer issue because we have common enemies, and we have common populations."

One of the tactics used is to talk about queer people as all rich, white, Chelsea boys, when in fact we have poor people that are queer the same way we have poor people in every segment of our community. The right wing has talked a lot about regulating behavior. They do that when they talk about the poor, and they do that when they talk about queer people. When they talk about family values, that is an argument that is used pretty much on a regular basis against queer people and against poor people. The talk about illegitimacy and out-of-wedlock births has got to be of concern to a queer couple that has a child. When you are talking about identifying parents as a married man and woman as the only responsible and normal way to have a family, what does that mean about queer people as well as poor people? The use of the government control over our bodies is a tactic that the right likes to use, and I see a really strong link when they talk

about family caps, which say “If you have more than X number of children, you are not going to get anymore welfare help to pay for them.” I see a strong parallel to that and sodomy laws, and telling people what you can and cannot do with your bodies and having the government punish those who do not use their bodies in an appropriate way. An analogy could be drawn to abortion rights as well there.

I like to use this quote from a Christian conservative presidential candidate, Alan Keyes, and I would like you all to tell me if you can determine whether he is talking about gay people or welfare recipients here. He said in 1995, “We need a system that can support people who are trying to do the right thing, who choose the right marriage partner, get married, and have children.” Now who thinks he was talking about gay people? A show of hands if you think he was talking about gay people. Okay, a couple hands. And who thinks he was talking about welfare recipients? He was actually talking about welfare recipients, but the language of getting married and having children and choosing the right partner is language that has been hurled against gay people all the time, and by him as well as by others. I like that quote because it really illustrates the parallels.

I did not want to dwell too much on this, but another good example is Senator Nichols, who sponsored a bill that would provide family tax relief to stay-at-home mothers. Now, who is going to be a stay-at-home mother? Obviously, if you are a poor person or a single mother, you are not a stay-at-home mother. This is a tax break that is going to benefit a certain class of people and a certain class of mothers. It was really about providing tax breaks to middle- and upper-class families, and denying those tax breaks to poorer people. Coincidentally, he was one of the prime sponsors of the Defense of Marriage Act, which is what Bill Clinton signed that defined marriage between a man and a woman only. He is really concerned with defining what is a family (which is a man and a woman) and then deciding what kind of families get tax breaks, and his idea of who gets tax breaks basically means not poor people and not queer people. I like to use Alan Keyes and Senator Nichols because those examples are so horrible but they make for good and easy illustrations, but obviously those tactics are prevalent throughout the right.

I could go on and on documenting parallels, but I will not. I would just like to frame this issue in that context because it is really important to recognize that where there are common enemies, there are common allies, and the two movements can work together with a chance of defeating common enemies.

Last October, New York State Senator Tom Duane and I organized a forum that brought together over 60 different organizations - as I mentioned, some were queer and some were welfare rights advocates - to address how welfare reform has affected queer people. As a result of that forum, a coalition has been formed called the Queer Economic Justice Network, which is now an official subcommittee of the Welfare Reform Network. We meet once a month, the second Wednesday of every month at 4:00 at different locations each month. We are taking on a variety of projects, trying to get the queer community to focus on poverty issues because frankly, the queer community has not been so great on taking on poverty issues, and trying to get the welfare community to take on more queer issues because frankly, the welfare community has not been so great about taking on queer issues. Besides going around and talking at various conferences and coalitions, so far what we have managed to accomplish is to get the Empire State Pride Agenda to incorporate specific welfare reform into their lobby for the first time ever. We are also working on developing a survey to ascertain what the level of poverty in the queer

community in New York is.

I am going to jump to the audience participation part of our presentation. If it is not abundantly clear already, I am not a lawyer. My background is in advocacy and training. I am going to get you all to participate. I need about 12 or 13 volunteers to read one little case study that we have here. These are case studies based on real people, some of whom we know, one of whom is dating someone here in the audience. The point of this is to illustrate the concrete effects of welfare reform on the queer community, and after we do that, we are going to back up, and Ricky is going to talk about how these horrible things came to pass. I want to start by talking about homelessness and hunger within the queer community, and let's start with our beloved Dave Schwing, whoever has him.

Audience member: Hello, I am Dave Schwing. I am the director of the Substance Abuse Program at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center. I have seen an increase in homelessness among my clients in the past since the 1996 welfare reform laws. In 1996, 5% of the Center's clients were homeless, but by last year that figure had more than tripled to 16%. I believe that the increase in homelessness is directly related to the dismantling of government safety net systems that used to provide enough support to keep my recovering clients off the streets.

Audience member 2: Hello, my name is John Reggasano. For the past few years, I worked as the Development Director of New York's Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). MCC is a religious organization serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community. We are the largest gay organization in the world. I am here to say that, as a result of welfare reform, the need for food has increased tremendously among poor queer people. MCC-New York runs a food pantry service that serves food to the hungry. About 1/3 of those fed are LBGT people. In 1996, before welfare reform, MCC's food pantry served 1,600 meals each month. Presently, MCC serves 3300 meals per month. This is an increase of over 100%. MCC increased the number of meals served to keep up with the huge increase in the demand for food. MCC has had to adjust that position, the funding system, to accommodate the increased demand for food. The increased demand for food is the direct result of welfare reform.

Joseph: I would like to start the participation with the bios of Dave and John because they are good examples of how there is poverty in the queer community and how queer people have been affected, in some ways exactly the same as other poor people. The next bios that you are going to be hearing are examples of how queer people have been affected in one of two ways, either in exactly the same way as other poor people, or in ways that are very specific to the fact that they are queer. Those first two, talking about the increase in homelessness or the increase in poverty, are pretty typical of how all people have been affected by welfare reform. The other examples that are now going to follow are more specifically related to being queer and poor. And now we are going to go to David Pumo.

Audience member 3: Hi, I am David Pumo. I am the director of the Lesbian and Gay Youth Project at the Urban Justice Center. I have seen an increase in prostitution among LGBT youth as a result of welfare reform. According to the Hetrick-Martin Institute, about half of the youth living on the streets on New York City identify as LGBT. These youth usually become homeless when they are kicked out of their homes for being LBGT, when they ran away from home to escape abuse related to their being LBGT. In 1994, a study found that 75% of homeless youth

survive by working as prostitutes. It is my belief that that number has gone up as a result of welfare reform, since it is so much harder to access benefits that would provide a safety net. In order for someone under the age of 21 to collect benefits, he or she must live at home with their families unless he or she may prove that living at home is impossible. Obtaining that proof is extremely difficult. Listen to these two examples...

Audience member 4: My name is Mark. I am 16 years old and gay. Last year, my mother drove me to New York City from Texas. When we got here, she threw me out of the car, turned around, and drove back to Texas. She abandoned me because I am gay. She has refused to sign any papers stating that she did this, and so I cannot provide evidence to the government that I cannot live at home. I have been unable to get any government support and have had to work as a prostitute in order to make a living.

Audience member 5: My name is Jose. I am 17 years old. My grandmother says that I can live with her, but she is so homophobic that I do not feel safe there. I feel hated and scared when I am there. I feel safer living on the streets than I do living with her. But she will not sign any papers to help me get help from the government. She says that I can and should live with her. As a result, I cannot get any welfare. According to the Urban Justice Center, as a result of these new government rules, queer youth like me living on the streets are finding it harder to get government aid and are turning to prostitution as a means of survival at a higher rate than before welfare reform.

Joseph: Another problem with the difficult proof necessary to obtain welfare benefits is that the new neutral zone which serves homeless queer youth has reported that they have an ongoing problem where their clients come from. Their youth clients who have been thrown out of their homes or have run away from homes often have parents who then lie on their income tax reports and continue to claim their children as deductions, even though they are not living with them and have no financial stake in their child's lives. This makes it difficult for the youth to obtain welfare benefits, and forget about things like when they are applying for college when they are old enough and they need financial aid, and to get the aid they have to prove that they are on their own, which they cannot do if their parents have been claiming them. But things like basic survival safety nets like we have been talking about are next to impossible for them to get. I want to have a couple more people read about how difficult it is to access what benefits still remain as a result of welfare reform. In fact, one of the people is Bob Bacigalupi, whose bio is circulating the room but who is actually sitting here in person.

Audience member 6: Hello, I am Bob Bacigalupi. I am with Legal Services of New York. As a result of welfare reform, homophobic welfare workers can deny them to LGBT recipients. Since the recent reform, New York City administration gives to those employees who work at welfare job centers increased discretion regarding who will get aid and who will be denied. If a welfare worker simply does not like an applicant, there are a variety of ways that the worker can choose not to grant that applicant aid. In a homophobic society, it should not be surprising that some welfare workers might not like an effeminate man, an openly gay woman, or a transgendered person. The reality of how the new welfare system has been implemented is that there is no systemic way of preventing those personal biases and bigotry from determining who gets benefits.

Audience member 7: Hi my name is Roz Bluenstein, and I am the director of the Gender Identity

Project. Transgender people are not safe at workfare sites. The new welfare law requires that almost all recipients participate in some form of work in exchange for their benefits. In New York City, the workfare program is called the Work Experience Program, but does not allow participants to have any choice regarding the type of work he or she would prefer to do. Yet those workfare sites assigned are frequently a danger for transgender people. The majority of my clients were harassed verbally and physically at their workfare sites. Many of them felt so unsafe at their sites that they chose to drop out of the program and give up aid. A majority of those people returned to working the streets as prostitutes, where they felt safer.

Audience member 8: Hello, I am Heidi Durrow from the Urban Justice Center. LGBT youth are losing their benefits due to unfair sanctions. As David already explained, there are thousands of youth homeless and living on the streets because they are queer. If these young people want government aid, New York City welfare requires them to participate in the Work Experience Program, the city's workfare program. Homeless LGBT youth, like other homeless people, find they are often unable to maintain a regular schedule. Because many of them are sleeping on the streets, with no shower or alarm clock, and may be eating their meals at different places every day, it is impossible to adhere perfectly to a work schedule. Under the new welfare system, they are sanctioned (i.e., punished) so easily and randomly that they could easily lose their benefits. It is much easier to get kicked out of WEP than it is to get fired from a real job. Individuals who, at their site supervisor's discretion, are deemed noncompliant with their work assignments, are sanctioned and lose their cash assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid benefits for a set period of time - often permanently. About 40% of WEP participants have been sanctioned. So many of these sanctions have been so arbitrary that the city wins less than 40% of appeals for fair hearings.

Audience member 9: Hello, my name is Naomi Sunshine, and I am a case manager at Housing Works. About 40% of my clients there are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. All of my clients are on DAS and so they are officially exempt from work requirements like WEP. However, I regularly see cases where the city screws up and sends threatening letters to my clients, telling them that they have missed their work assignment and are about to be cut off. Even more often, I have clients whose Medicaid, food stamps, and public assistance were closed inaccurately. At any given time, about 5% of my clients have been inaccurately cut off from aid. It usually takes 4-6 weeks to get a situation like that straightened out. I am not a conspiracy theorist at all, but I have to say that I do think there is a connection between all the cases that are "mistakenly" closed at any time and the reports that the city releases citing how the welfare rolls have dropped.

Joseph: Welfare, as most of you have probably realized, is really an issue of concern for mothers with children. They are the people most affected by welfare reform. And if you are a lesbian, there are going to be particular implications for you in a system that is really concerned with the legitimacy of two-parent households. I want to hear from Tim and then Terry about this.

Audience member 10: My name is Tim Sweeney and I am on staff at the Empire State Pride Agenda. The new welfare policies discriminate against LGBT parents. In exchange for benefits, recipients must participate in workfare requirements, unless they have a newborn infant. However, taking care of children other than your own does not meet the workfare requirement. Often, LGBT couples who are raising children together are not recognized equally as parents. Often the birth mother or the adoptive father has legal recognition as a parent that his or her

partner is denied. This means that a lesbian who is the other mother to her partner's biological child and may need to stay home to take care of her infant, is not exempt as a heterosexual legal parent would be from the workfare requirement.

Audience member 11: My name is Terry Hogas and I am the director of Center Kids: The Family Program and the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center. Welfare regulations do not recognize lesbian parenting arrangements. Federal welfare regulations now require that states find "deadbeat dads" and make them pay child support. The federal government may pressure and or penalize a state that provides support to a mother without first making attempts to track down the father who is not contributing to his child's upbringing. However, many lesbian mothers conceive with the help of a sperm donor, often with the arrangement that the donor will play no role, financial or emotional, in the raising of the child. Impoverished lesbian mothers who refuse to identify the biological father of their children risk losing their benefits. It is important to note that, conversely, a lesbian mom who was abandoned by her female partner would receive no such aid from the government in forcing her ex-partner, the "deadbeat dyke," to help support the child.

Joseph: The issue of lesbian mothers in welfare reform is on this nebulous ground because no one in the welfare community has addressed this and no one in the queer community has addressed this and there have not been any test cases yet to pursue this. These last two testimonies are really speculative. The fact that the law does not have any clarity or the definition of family is not gay-friendly is what we are concerned about, but we do not actually know the practical numbers or the impact that this has had.

Audience member: Excuse me, but could that be because many of them are in the closet?

Joseph: Absolutely, absolutely.

Audience member: If you are in the closet, and you are poor, you are not going to go to the welfare center and come out.

Joseph: Absolutely. One of the issues that has come out is the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, which serves people who have been victims of hate crimes but also people who have suffered from domestic violence in gay relations, which happens just as frequently as in straight relationships, has said that one third of their clients are on public assistance. And yet even of the one third of clients who are on public assistance, only one of them has ever applied for the domestic violence waiver, and they think that this is largely because their clients are scared to come out. This is because if you are poor, the chances of your kids being taken away from you is already pretty great. If you are poor and in a domestic violence situation, it is greater, and if you are poor and in a domestic violence situation, you don't want to have the third stigma of coming out as a lesbian. I think that is a real problem.

The next two examples relate to the immigration policy changes that came with welfare reform, which were sweeping and disgusting and hard to understand.

Audience member 12: My name is Dulce Diaz, and I work at the New York Immigration Coalition. LGBT immigrants do not have equal access to benefits. Many legal immigrants still cannot get full public benefits. A legal permanent resident who arrives in the US after August

22, 1996, is not eligible for government benefits. If one of these immigrants was heterosexual and needed welfare benefits, he or she would at least have the option to get married, become a citizen, and thus be entitled to them. LGBT couples cannot get married in order to secure these benefits, so queer immigrants do not have the same access to public benefits that heterosexual immigrants have.

Joseph: Robert?

Audience member 13: Hello, my name is Robert E. Banks. I am the Director of Legal Services Advocacy at Gay Men's Health Pride. Welfare reform has had an overwhelming impact on non-citizen LGBT immigrants who have HIV/AIDS. Citizens who are eligible for the maximum government benefits receive more than those immigrants who are not citizens but are legally permanent residents (LPRs). LPRs are eligible for more benefits than other kinds of immigrants. In short, the less documented you are, the fewer benefits for which you are eligible. Since 1987, there has been a ban in this country of those who have a communicable disease of public health significance. However, HIV-positive immigrant people can be admitted if they are the legal spouse of a citizen or LPR. Yet because they cannot marry, HIV-positive queer people cannot become legal permanent residents whereas heterosexual HIV-positive people can. As a result of recent welfare reform, legal permanent residents have greater access to benefits, and since LGBT immigrants who are HIV-positive cannot become LPRs, the result is that LGBT HIV-positive immigrants have less access to benefits than those heterosexual ones. As a result of recent reform, about 80% of GMHC's immigrant clients do not qualify to receive government benefits.

Joseph: There are two other examples or issues that we have identified of how queer people have been affected by welfare reform. One is about seniors and one is about substance abuse and since I am the one who works with seniors, I will save that for me. Barbara Ann is going to speak about the issue of substance abuse. I want to be clear in advance that it is meant to be one example - any of these bios that all of you have read could be the subject for a whole workshop - but Barbara Ann is going to focus on the issue of substance abuse and how people in recovery and on welfare have been affected. I will end this section by talking about seniors.

Homebound seniors have been really screwed by welfare reform because of the issue of electronic benefits transfer. The method of giving benefits to people has changed. People used to get checks in the mail; now they get a card, and they have to use the card to access their benefits. If you are a homebound senior, gay or straight, you have to rely on someone that you trust to take this card and get your benefits for you. It used to be that when it came by check, you could pay your bills by check; you could do it all from your bed.

A lot of senior groups have not been so pleased about this. It assumes that you have someone that you trust to hand over access to all of your financial savings. The reality is that 66% of queer seniors live alone as compared to 26% of heterosexual seniors, largely because if you are a queer senior you grew up in a different time and are less likely to have supportive siblings who can be a caretaker. You are less likely to have children who can be a caretaker. A lot of queer seniors are estranged from their families or do not have families. The caretaker that they have to hand their card over to is often someone that they met that same day, or whose name they don't even recall. It is a real problem accessing benefits now.

Having painted such a lovely, Pollyanna picture of the results of welfare reform, I am now going to let Ricky explain how all this happened.

Ricky: I hope these are good illustrations of how queer people are affected and also just a reminder to people that queer people are affected by welfare reform too. Unfortunately, there are all too many people in queer communities who have to be reminded that queer people are not all of means. Welfare reform is partly a queer issue because there are an awful lot of queer people who are affected by it. In addition, there also ways - of which you have just heard - in which queer people are disparately affected by it.

What is curious about welfare reform is that it is actually nothing new at all, and the things that we are hearing these days are repetitions of things that have been going on for literally hundreds of years around poverty and relief. The debate over when you actually allow someone to get some assistance so that they are not completely dependent on the labor market or their families. More recently, in 1988, the country passed what at the time was considered to be welfare reform with a capital W and a capital R, which established the supposed principle of a social contract which said that "Yes, we can give to people to help support them, but they have to give back." There is a two-way partnership that because the country is being so generous to people that people have to in some way earn that generosity by acting "responsibly" - another key word, along with "dependency." It established some degree of mutual responsibility allegedly in the Family Support Act. That Act began to be implemented in the States in 1990. In other words, the implementation of that grand welfare reform scheme happened precisely six long years before the entire thing supposedly had to be overhauled completely again. Why did that happen? Because in 1992, we had a Presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, who ran on "ending welfare as we know it." Apparently, he had decided that in two short years, we had already seen that the welfare reform of 1988 had not produced sufficient responsibility in people that he, as the champion of personal responsibility (ha!) had to further that goal by ending welfare. He then proceeded to attempt to implement it with various proposals during his first couple of years and then got a big helping hand from his friend Newt Gingrich, who was elected and announced the Contract on America in 1994. It is worth noting that in the long Preamble of the Contract on America - the welfare section of the Contract on America - of Newt Gingrich, began by saying that marriage is the basis of a civilized society, and went on from there to talk about all the deviant behavior particularly among people of color and it talks about race in really vile ways in the bill that he proposed. It is right there in black and white, so to speak. He goes on to point out the ways in which social deviance, meaning people who are not good, upstanding white people of means, has caused every kind of harm you can think of in this society, and particularly people who have been sexually deviant by not getting married and sticking with their spouses, not counting those who served their wives with divorce papers when they were in the hospital recovering from cancer. [Laughter.] Another personally responsible individual promoting welfare reform.

All of this percolated to the point where, after a couple of vetoes, the President got a bill he just could not refuse signing, and at the advice of personally responsible Dick Morris, the personally responsible Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility Act in 1996. Although the attacks on deviance, including unmarried people and black people and so forth that were in the Gingrich text were watered down some, the Personal Responsibility Act and the implementing regulations do talk about, in its purposes, reducing illegitimacy and promoting marriage. We cannot lose sight of the fact that welfare reform is about eliminating deviance. Where do deviance and

dependency come together in all this? The right wing in some ways is a little more honest about welfare reform than a lot of other folks because so much of the point of welfare reform is about social control. What they really mean when they say they want to end dependence is that they want people to not be dependent on, not to be able to sort of have the support that the homeless children, for example, the homeless youth we were hearing about before or other homeless people we were hearing about before would have or domestic violence victims have, when they have some means of support other than their abusive spouse, their abusive parents, or abusive employers, or abusive employment relationships. I do not think there are too many prostitution relationships in this city that are terribly good for the worker. What they are talking about is forcing people to live under the mercies of their families, the appropriate authorities in their lives, and their employers.

The fact of the matter is the welfare reformers are actually the ones who are promoting dependency, dependency on families, dependency on the labor market. They are trying to undermine peoples' ability to have some choice and some say so over that and obviously that affects queer people because queer people have a particular need not to be dependent on their families and not to be dependent on abusive employers and employment relationships and I think we have already heard illustrated how that plays out for people.

Now where does that hit us in New York? Well, the mayor was not one to wait for federal welfare reform. He always has to be on the cutting edge - cutting being the operative word. He got started with welfare reform well before the federal law changed. The same sort of theories run from his speeches. I could go on forever, it is one of my favorite subjects about the grotesque and fascistic aspects of his welfare reform positions and labor policies and so forth. The means by which (and this is what is really most significant for people on a daily level) he has implemented this theory and made into practices through the bureaucracy of the human resources administration.

There is a nice anecdote about Mayor Giuliani and welfare reform and queer issues which happened in 1997. What the mayor does with a lot of his policy speeches is he has his minions float something around and see how the public opinion polls go with it and then if they do well he will give the speech. So he has the Manhattan Institute issue reports and then sees how they go. He had his minion Heather McDonald issue a whole speech about marriage: about how marriage is the basis of a civilized society and how every social problem you can possibly think of in our society is due to the dissolution of marriage. Of course the dissolution of marriage is a moral problem not having anything to do with the inadequacies of marriage, or other economic pressures on marriage. So the mayor was actually poised to give this speech, and it got leaked to the press the same week that he was about to sign into law the domestic partnership law, and this was a little bit of a problem to him in terms of public relations. It wound up getting sent to *New York Newsday*. *Newsday* wrote an article about it and somehow the speech got disowned rapidly. "That was not my speech, that was her speech. I am not going to give that speech, people are claiming I am going to give that speech, of course I am not going to give that speech, that is not what I have to say at all. And tomorrow night I really was not intending to give the speech that I had prepared for it I was going to give some other speech." So, no speech. And what happened was instead, he actually floated a different piece and Mickey Coase, another great individual, floated a piece about the how the WEP program is really the reincarnation of the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s. Just without any wages. [Laughter.] He left out that part. And that was the major welfare address that the mayor gave. This is all sort of

humorous but I think it is important to realize what was going on here politically. The mayor has extreme right-wing views on welfare reform as with everything else. That it is about social control, he knows damn well, but he also knows the political realities of the city, and he knows that there are limitations on what you can get away with in this city, especially if you want gay white money and support. And he realized he had a problem, that he had promised to Empire State Pride Agenda [ESPA] (with all due respect to people currently working at ESPA who were not working there then, or responsible for decision-making then) in exchange for their not supporting Ruth Messinger, who had, whatever her other flaws, probably the best record on gay rights issues of any candidate we had seen, ever. They promised not to endorse her because he promised this domestic partnership bill. So he had to deliver on that bill to this organized constituency and he had to eat his words on marriage. Of course, there are other why this mayor may want to eat his words on marriage anyway, but that is a different topic. I think you see the real life political interplay of these issues and also about how power matters and why it is, for example, that those of us who are welfare reform advocates wanted to reach out to organize queer organizations, mostly identified as gay and lesbian, rather than queer, organizations, to say to them, "Look, you have got to sign on to these issues because you matter politically. Not only are some of your constituents disproportionately affected by this, but you have political clout here that we desperately need." That is also part of the political dynamic.

How has the mayor managed to do his dirty work with welfare reform, which has been one of his great successes? He has managed to reduce the caseload by hundreds of thousands of people who are now, of course, fabulously wealthy and successful and independent in their lives. Well, the practice is through the bureaucracy, and one of the premises of welfare reform is that people are in this situation because of their deviance, their moral softness. They become dependent and not enterprising and they are not willing to live by "the rules" that we in authority present and mandate. So, in implementing that there are two principle features: one is that you do not ever treat anyone as an individual without actual, individuated needs, background, goals, purposes, agency, because if you did you would have to recognize their humanity and you might have to recognize that actually there are things people need by way of assistance to get where they want to be. The second goal is to knock people off, to teach them that you have to follow the rules at all costs or that is it. The goal is to set up this bureaucracy that is totally inflexible, which treats everyone the same, which has a set of rules that meets no one's needs, but less so anyone who deviates from them. The farther you deviate from the norm, the easier a target you are for being taken off the rolls. As described before with the job centers, where basically they will come up with any excuse not to even give you an application so that you are not even registered, they can just get rid of you like that. You disappear, you were never there, you are invisible. You set up a bureaucracy that functions according to these incredibly rigid rules, that create a million appointments, a million pieces of mail, a million requirements to baffle and confuse everyone. It creates hair-trigger response sanctions and treats everyone in the same abusive way so that the more marginalized people are the ones who are easiest to pick off and you can pick off the most people possible.

Audience member: Can I just interject with another example of that, of one of the bios, one of the many other bios that could have been read earlier, is transgender people. And it is a perfect example of what Ricky just said: of treating everyone as if they are all exactly the same and refusing to individuate. And punishing people for not. One of the things that happens now at job centers is that people are required to wear "proper" business clothing so that they can know what it is like to go to a real job and a real job interview. And if you are a transgender person, the job

center's definition of what is appropriate business attire may very well be different from what you may define, that is being what you are comfortable in, and this is one way of weeding people out right there and then, so that they are cut from the rolls immediately. So that they are faced either with doing something that feels completely unnatural, to be part of a system that does not make room for individuals, or they are cooked.

RICKY BLUM: I'm just going to wrap up before leading into Barbara Ann's presentation on the substance abuse rules and how those are good examples of exactly what we're talking about. I wanted to mention the *Callahan* case, which Charles King referred to this morning in the plenary. I'm mentioning it partly because it's such a key example of what's really going on. I also wanted to talk about it because, on a personal note, I was just saying to someone at lunch that if I had retired now, I would look back and feel like I did something useful in my last ten years because of the decision we just got this week. The mayor has wanted since 1995 to be able to throw people out of homeless shelters or deny them shelter in the first instance, if they are out of compliance with any shelter rules or any public assistance rules. Now, of course, it is easier than breathing to be out of compliance with a public assistance rule. In fact, you often don't have to do a thing: your case worker just makes the mistake for you. And correcting it is a nightmare. The mayor was setting up a situation where we were sort of taking this mania about following rules to its most extreme, which is that you would actually lose your life on the streets of New York because you had violated some welfare rule. My law school professor used to say, "You know, if we had only had capital punishment for double-parking, it would probably go away." [Laughter.] Maybe I should say today I feel especially bitter about it, I mean the idea that shooting an innocent person forty-one times is a tragic mistake that's excusable, quote-unquote legally justified, but of course missing a welfare appointment can mean a death sentence, is a sort of perverse view of the world, to say the least. So anyway, that was the proposal and we got a decision this week from the State Supreme Court Justice who presided over this case for many years in the consent decree in the *Callahan* litigation over homeless people without children, who said that it would violate the consent decree in that case to deny or terminate shelter on the grounds of violating any of these different bureaucratic rules. It is actually a very, very beautifully written, moving decision from the heart, showing that judges can still be human beings and good judges at the same time. Of course, by the way, the mayor who last night expressed his profound respect for the judiciary, denounced this judge the other day, trashed him after the decision came out. But it is a profoundly moving and humane decision, where she talks about how bureaucratic error can lead to a person's death by exposure, death by violence, or death by sheer neglect on the streets of New York City. And, unfortunately, we in the queer community have actually seen precisely that happen over and over again as you have heard in those presentations. And now they are trying to do to people in substance abuse programs. How is that for a transition? [Applause]

Barbara Ann Perina:

Before I talk about the Human Resources Administration and Dr. Frank Lipton, I want to put in perspective why this is one of the greatest examples of how welfare reform has a direct, dramatic impact on the immediate health and well-being of human beings. And especially when it comes to comparing where we were twenty years ago and where we are today. Substance abuse was always viewed as a disease. Many people have heard the disease concept of addiction: addiction is hereditary, addiction is medical, addiction is often progressive, and addiction is often fatal. Addiction was looked at as a disease, a medical complication simply for two reasons: one, to remove the stigma from saying, "Oh, I am an alcoholic I am a drug addict,"; and two, to allow

insurance companies to pay for treatment, to be brutally honest. That was the way it was from the 1960s into the 1970s. For the last twenty years the substance abuse treatment community has actively looked at the disease concept of addiction and how cookie-cutter treatment affected different populations.

Not only am I the director of the Lambda program and recovery program, which is an LGBT-specific component of a huge outpatient facility called Human Service Centers in Queens, but I am also on the board of the National Lesbian and Gay Addiction Professionals Association, and I am co-chair of the New York City Federation for Mental Health/Mental Hygiene and Alcoholism Services, citywide LGBT Issues Committee. I work with agencies all over the United States, Pride Institute, the National Association of Alcohol and Drug-Abuse Professionals (NADAP) in developing cultural competency standards for special needs populations. I have been working in this field for many, many years trying to change the way we treat special needs populations, which this cookie-cutter approach to treatment ignores. Over a period of about twenty years, we finally went from this far, kind of right wing, one-size-treatment-fits-all to beginning to recognize, and to make the state bodies who license treatment centers, not only treatment centers, but providers and individual counselors accept the fact that, cultural competency issues are an important and integral part of dealing with your clients. With substance abuse, treatment is multi-variant and multi-determinant. It is not one-size-fits-all, and if it is multi-variant and multi-determinant in nature, then it has to be treated in a multiple-disciplinary setting, where a team of professionals takes the entire individual into account, their core issues, their history, their sexuality, their ethnic and racial background, their family, their entire gamut, and it becomes a very successful way to treat individuals. It is humane, it is non-judgmental, it is sensitive and it is affirming. We have found a dramatic decrease in the recidivism rate of individuals who enter treatment in this type of setting. OASAS, which is the New York City Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuses Services, teaches this. I teach addiction studies in Queens at Queensborough Community Colleges. I write this stuff. OASAS accepts it - it is in their training manuals, it is on the test. Every state in the Union accepts it. This is the way it is supposed to be.

So, there is the history. Now we come to today. When welfare reform went into effect in 1996, when the PRA went into effect in 1996, one of the things that the Human Resources Administration (HRA) was asked to do was to look at the number of welfare recipients who were engaged in treatment programs for substance and alcohol abuse, mental health patients, etc. and so forth, and look at developing what they eventually called the Clinical Practice Guidelines for moving these individuals on welfare, who were in substance abuse treatment, from welfare to work. Now why is this specifically a queer issue and why is it so important?

One of the things we found in our research, in working with queer populations and LGBT clients and substance abuse, is that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, bisexual or transgender, tend to need treatment longer than heterosexual clients. Actually, why don't I just put it this way: any client with deep emotional core issues, in the LGBT community, with internalized homophobia, with internalized trans-phobia, with fear of heterosexism, or who goes to treatment in a heterosexist environment and is afraid to come out, is going to need more treatment because you cannot deal with the core issues. And we find that most LGBT individuals, before you can even begin to address the core issues, you have got to address the substance abuse, get them sober and functioning, get them some basic life-coping skills and mechanisms to get through early sobriety. But to keep them sober, to keep them clean and get them moving forward in their

lives, you begin to need to address those core issues of low self-esteem, self-hatred, heterosexism, homophobia, how they could not come out to their family, how “I am a cop and I never wanted to be a cop but my father was a cop, my grandfather was a cop. I really wanted to be a ballerina.” All this stuff that the clients internalize. And most special needs populations who are disenfranchised and marginalized and discriminated against internalize many of these same issues, but I am going to keep it to the LGBT community.

What the Human Resources Administration basically did was, behind everybody’s back, speak to the Office of OASAS, and a number of what they called “clinically recognized experts” in the field of substance abuse, and put together these guidelines - I am going to tell you what the guidelines say in a second. And these guidelines never really went out for review. They were never discussed in an open forum. They sent out a group of standards that basically took twenty years of work, of research, of what we call “best practice research” that everyone agrees upon, and threw it in the garbage. And basically they say that a client who enters substance abuse treatment - you are a welfare recipient, you go to welfare, they give you basically a five-minute assessment to determine if you are a candidate for substance abuse treatment or not. That is number one. We did research, and we found out that while everyone thought they were doing about 45-minute- or hour-long assessments, they actually do about five minutes.

If they determine that you are a candidate for substance abuse treatment, they put you into an HRA-approved treatment program, and the guidelines state a number of things. One, you must be compliant with all of HRAs and the substance abuse treatment provider’s requirements - completely compliant. You cannot miss any sessions, you cannot relapse, there is no such thing as use, your intoxicologies are now punitive instead of what we call “intervention-based” (where urine is used to identify relapse in its early stages). Once somebody has relapsed, what happens? Guilt begins to happen, low self-esteem, the shame builds up. They may not come to a meeting in a relapse mode. So urines are supposed to not be punitive, but intervention-based. Now they are determined to be punitive because HRA must be notified of all positive urines. If you come out positive, you have not complied with the guidelines, and you are now kicked out of the program and you lose your benefits. If you miss a session, you are kicked out of the program and you lose your benefits. It goes on to say that you must be ready to engage in WEP within 90 days of entering treatment. So at the end of 90 days, regardless of where you are in treatment, you have to go into WEP. You have to do the entire 38 hours, but still maintain treatment. Now that might be fine for somebody who is your basic, classic alcoholic or somebody who was mandated by their job because they came to work drunk one day and does not really have a whole lot of other problems, but it does not work with special needs populations.

What they have done, and these are just a few examples, in the guidelines is set up every disenfranchised, marginalized, discriminated-against population to fail in treatment. There is no possible way that anyone, that I have found, who has been in treatment for the first or second time, who falls under what we call the special needs guidelines when we look at cultural competency issues, can maintain these clinical standards. It is impossible.

The treatment providers are threatening that if you do not comply with this, we will stop referring clients to you. For many treatment providers out there, this is their only source of revenue, so the treatment providers basically are saying we have no choice but to comply with this. Basically, this results in changing everything that OASAS and the treatment community has said, and throwing it out the window, in order to keep treatment centers’ doors open. This is

what Giuliani, Jason Turner, who is the director of HRA, and Frank Lipton, who is the deputy commissioner/medical director, who knows nothing about substance abuse, by the way, have done in response to welfare reform. There have already been test cases. They have not happened at my agency. They are beginning to take people off the welfare rolls. We are waiting for test cases like the transgendered individual or someone that we can really go after these people with and say “This is unacceptable, this is simply bad treatment.” Not only are they trying to throw people out of shelters, not only are they making mistakes on the paperwork, not only, with the elders, are they forcing them to give their cards away, but they are taking a population which has significant difficulties to begin with and putting them at risk because we know the progression of substance abuse and alcohol abuse - if you cannot get treatment, if you are somewhat motivated to get treatment, if you relapse, then you get thrown out of treatment - well, we know what the outcome is going to be.

There are just a couple things I want to read. A number of agencies have written the HRA complaining about this. These are all the “clinical experts” that HRA discussed the situation with. Every single one of these people has written a letter to HRA saying this is not what they said. In fact one of these women happens to be the vocational counselor at my agency.

The other thing that has happened is that OASAS is in a quandary. OASAS is the state office of alcohol and substance abuse, and they set the guidelines for state treatment facilities. They also set the guidelines for counselors, credentialing and training. HRA is saying OASAS signed off on this, except this is in direct contradiction to what the training manuals and OASAS guidelines offer credentialing and licensing. So when you call OASAS and you ask them for the standard for all this, you get referred to like twenty different people until you get tired of speaking to everybody because no one will take a stand on this at OASAS. Unofficially, off the record, OASAS is very upset about this because this is not what they agreed to. But because it is the Pataki administration and it is Republicans, it is Giuliani, no one up there will actually say it publicly, that this is a problem. And it is going to be a problem because, with the new test coming out for credentialing, my question to OASAS was, as a provider of educational services, how do I teach this? As a licensed provider, teaching in Queens and Queensborough Community Colleges, what do I do with this? And they cannot answer me. So something is going to come out from that.

The other thing I want to read, is having written this in such a way, I think that my favorite line in this whole document is, “The guidelines recognize that substance dependence is generally viewed as a chronic relapsing disorder, and emphasize the importance of reassessment and crisis intervention whenever there is evidence of relapse. The guidelines conform with the Federal Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reallocations Act’s expectation that public assistance recipients will take personal responsibility for their compliance with the treatment goals of becoming clean, sober, and self-sufficient.” Is that the biggest piece of double-talk you have ever heard in your life? “We recognize that chemical dependency is a relapsing disorder, but if you relapse, you have not taken personal responsibility and we are going to throw you out of the rolls.” [Laughter.]

The agencies that have written to the HRA include the New York Association for Alcoholism Professionals, which was the first agency to actually write HRA and say “uh-uh, this is wrong,” the New York City Federation for Mental Health/Mental Hygiene and Alcoholism Services LGBT, NADAP has written a letter. NADAP, as a national organization, is also coming out with

a policy statement against this. These agencies are going to hold these congressmen in Washington and just blast the hell out of them because this is bad for everybody in the profession because if it works here, you can clearly know it is going to be replicated in other states. This is just bad treatment. It is actually dangerous. The National Association of Lesbian and Gay Addiction Professionals has written a letter, and I just want to give you the high points of the letter, and then I am going to give you a summary of Frank Lipton's response, which Ricky was kind enough to give me.

The letter reads - this is the one from the Federation -

“Dr. Lipton,

We are writing on behalf of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans Judicial Committee of the New York City Federation for Mental Health/Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services to express our concerns about the implementation of the clinical practice guidelines removing individuals with substance abuse disorders from welfare-to-work, and ask that you reconsider. After reviewing the guidelines, it is clear that aspects of them are clinically contraindicated for effective treatment, but are also clearly discriminatory to individuals of culturally specific special treatment populations, including members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities. It is our understanding that HRA has consulted with regional members of the treatment communities during the development of these guidelines, we are displeased that a number of concerns and reservations that were clearly articulated in writing at those meeting have gone unheeded. The guidelines do not clarify that it is clearly inappropriate to universally characterize relapse as noncompliant behavior that should result in a sanction. It is clearly inappropriate not to take an individual's cultural and core issues into consideration when developing a treatment plan or treatment schedule. Any determination of noncompliance in mandated treatment should be made by the treatment program and pursuant to Social Service Law 132(f), only HRA staff persons who have received the appropriate clinical training should oversee the transfer of treatment clients between levels of care. [*Aside: And the reasons that is in there, is that when you go to HRA and you go to Social Service to apply for welfare, when you are assessed you will be assessed by a credentialed substance abuse counselor (CSAC) at that time. Once you are assessed and into treatment, you then go to a regular social services caseworker. The CSAC has nothing to do with your case anymore. So when you come up noncompliant, it is not a CSAC reviewing your case saying, “Well, that is part of it,” it is just another welfare worker who does not give a shit who is going to throw you off the rolls.] In keeping with the provisions of New York City Social Service law, the only persons subject to the loss of Medicaid due to treatment noncompliance are single adults who are determined unable to work because of alcohol or drug dependence, which is the safety net. They are trying to throw this across the board. Urine analysis should only be used where clinically indicated in the judgment of the treatment professional rather than punitively - that is to say, you do not have to do urines every single time a client comes in. Terminology such as “intensive treatment” should be used only in a manner consistent with OASAS regulations. HRA wants everyone in what they call “intensive treatment” for the first ninety days. Everybody - which is not always clinically appropriate, especially for some people who have significant core issues or other issues that may not even be group appropriate. Sometimes it can take 30, 60, 90 days just to be able to get someone to tell you what is going on in their life as far as where they really live.*

Those are the basic points. Dr. Lipton's response to the first letter that was sent down was that none of this was true. That they do not do any of this. Period. That this is a fabrication and that

they are meeting or exceeding all the recommendations across the board. Yet, to date, everyday I get dozens of letters from HRAs and dozens of requests on clients who are HRAs wanting to know why they are still on, whatever, that they have done this or that, and basically, we tell the HRA that we are not following the guidelines and that we will no longer accept HRA clients. We are not going to comply with these guidelines. There are only a couple of agencies out there that have agreed to do that. The majority of agencies have no choice. Just something to think about. And this affects everyone in this room, because if they can mandate treatment for alcohol and substance abuse, and if they can attempt to mandate work reform - and I do not even want to get into WEP, because WEP in and of itself is bad. This really makes a lot of sense with what they want to do with homeless and what they want to do with welfare. Think about this. To get a welfare check, you have got to go pick up garbage in the parks. And welfare is limited to three years. So if you end at three years, you have learned how to do what? To pick up garbage. There are no job skills. You cannot go to VESID (Vocational Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities) as part of WEP or as a substitute for WEP. You can go, but you still have to do your 38 hours a week of picking up garbage. Now, if you are a single mother, with no other source of income, and you are picking up garbage for 38 hours, and you cannot afford to get a babysitter, how are you going to go to VESID at night? So you cannot do any vocational work, they do not provide you with job skill training for anything, so after three years you have learned to pick up garbage and your welfare is cut off. And they do not hire people to pick up garbage because the Sanitation union will not allow it.

Ricky: And the Parks Department has not hired a new person since 1991 or something. Three-quarters of their workforce now is WEP participants.

Barbara Ann: End of three years is up. You have no benefits, no money. You become what? Homeless. And then Giuliani's idea, to get a bed in a homeless shelter, what do you have to do? Pick up garbage. Think about it. This is the mentality of what we are working with.

Joseph: I want to remind people that I had invited Barbara Ann to talk about the work she is doing on substance abuse because it is meant to be one example. Any of the stuff that I was talking about earlier about seniors, or about homeless youth, or domestic violence, or homelessness, or the way transgender people are treated within the system - any of those could be the subject of a really in-depth conversation here, and they are all pretty equally horrific. But I thought it was important to be able to focus on one aspect. For the remaining almost 15 minutes, I want to turn to you guys and see if you have any questions.

Audience Member: I play the devil's advocate. I specifically came to this conference for this workshop because I am still not convinced that welfare is a queer issue. How can you convince me so that I can give it my time and energy? And I am also a social worker during the day.

Ricky: Is it that you do not agree with the argument that there is a disparate impact on queer people in some of these programs like the way in which young people have to be connected to their families, or substance abuse, or is that you do not see...

AM: How the queer community can make a difference if we are so... how do you get the gay community to come on board, and how do you get the heterosexual community - especially from people of color communities - to take on our issues, and we take on their issues?

Joseph: I think I see what you are saying. You agree that welfare reform is a queer issue, but what your question is, is how we as a queer community should rally to this and bring others on board and make it part of everyone's agenda. Well, that is real simple. It is not THAT simple, but the way to approach it is - I try to approach it when I do these talks and I deal with peoples on LGBT and cultural competency by saying, "You know what? It is not only a queer issue. It is an ethnic, cultural and special-needs population issue that really affects all of us equally, and there are strength in numbers." As they often say in the trans community, no one can be free unless we are all free. If just one aspect of one community tries to attack this - it does not make any sense.

Audience Member: I guess my concern is more... it is around the broader area of welfare reform. When you have single mothers who cannot access childcare what are the right relations? All these attorneys talking, and all these service providers and so forth, and it is monumental, and it is a lot of paperwork, and... how do we work with our brothers and sisters in the straight community, these single mothers, these service providers for these single heterosexual mothers, who cannot get childcare because they do not meet certain regulations, and then we are coming in with lesbian mothers, and say that we also want access to that service? And then how do we get the gay community, these Chelsea boys and Park Slope dykes, to say this is an issue that we should get involved in?

Joseph: I think the strategy of the coalition is just forming. It is in its infant stage and it is obviously open to people's taking it in whatever direction people see fit, and to address finally what people see as the compartmentalization, or people saying, "This is my issue, my turf, my piece of it," because I think what happens is people wind up not having the political clout they could have when they are working entirely separately. I think when true presentations like this where you can show to a group - not this audience in particular, but teaching this to a mainstream gay or lesbian organization with some clout - to pitch it this way and say, "You have a stake in this. You have a stake in this because you have constituents who are affected by it, even if they are affected by it the same way lots of other people are affected by it. You have constituents who are affected specifically because they are queer, and you have political alliances here that are available to you who will otherwise be your enemies because they will see this as needing to put civil rights resources into this and not you, and why are you jumping ahead of our concerns." If you come forward and say, "No, we have got common cause here because we see the same kind of insidious governmental abuse, the kind that you do not like and the kind that we do not like," I think you will find there is an alliance that is possible despite the whole range of prejudice that people bring in from the whole range of communities on these things. And I think that is the impetus behind this coalition, is to do some outreach and to say, "We do have common cause. We do have common enemies. Let's see where we can leverage our resources through alliances rather than competing for them." That is at least the aspiration. We shall see whether that happens.

Audience Member: Two things. One, up until November, I was working in a senior management position over at HRA. I worked with Frank and with Jason and with the whole crew. And one of the things that Barbara might find amusing or terrifying, as I did, is that in the offices over at 180, Jason is referred to as "Mr. Secretary." I do not know if you have heard that. Because he is so convinced that if George W. becomes president, he will replace Donna Shalala. And Gray Caldman will be the nation's AIDS czar. And they are really serious. They really think this is gonna happen. It is sort of amusing. So one thing I have found this year that has

been really depressing in talking politically is how do we energize, how do we get people to really care? So many people have said in the last three weeks that this year is probably the worst election they have seen.. We have four presidential candidates that support the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA); four presidential candidates that support the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, three presidential candidates who support welfare reform; two senatorial candidates in NY who support DOMA and support welfare reform. And there is such a turn-off, that I find more and more people saying, “I am just not voting this year.” How do you change that, or what is the point of changing that if all the candidates agree?

Ricky: I just want to straighten one thing out, and I should have said this in my presentation. My goal is, in the work that I do is in theory, is the original theory of welfare reform, which is to find a way to get individuals linked back to life. Our goals are all the same in a way: I want to see my clients have healthy, productive lives, whatever that may be. That is my goal. It is how we get there that is another issue. So I just want to get that out there, because I think that message needs to get out to the nay-sayers. I am not saying that these people should be staying on welfare forever. My goal is to get these people who are disenfranchised and marginalized, to increase their self-esteem, to increase their self-worth, to get them vocational services, to get them the ability to become self-sufficient, self-loving, self-caring. But my way is a little bit different from their way. And no, that is not their goal, but that is what they tell you. That is how you have to slap them with that, and say, “These are our goals.” Because if you tell them that that is not your goal, you get the line that Lipton said, which is: What are you, full of shit? That is not what we meant.”

I would also just add about my little interjection about how only three of the four candidates supported welfare reform is a big deal, to me. I am not any major Bugby fan, and I have no interest in showing for him here and now, but it is for me that a choice for 4 crappy candidates has been delineated by the fact that one of them voted against welfare reform. And even though I think all of them suck in a lot of ways...I do not think it is a coincidence, for example, that all of the gay Democratic politicians and city council people here, that their endorsements split along racial lines. I know that they would never present it that way, but that we have the white, even the progressive people like Tom Duane who are involved (and I am thrilled that he has been involved in this); that Tom Duane and Chris Quinn endorsed Gore as Lopez and Phil Reed endorsed Bill Bradley, and cited specifically welfare reform as one of the reasons that they did so, I think that that is a lesson that we as a community need to learn. So while I am thrilled with a lot of the work that Tom and ESPA do, I think they need to be held accountable for how are you defining a gay issue, and who is your idea of gay. And if gay issues that only affect gay middle-class white people are how you are basing your endorsements, then that is a problem. I do not think it is a coincidence that our Democratic city council people split along racial lines, in terms of who they endorsed. And that the people of color cited welfare reform as well as one of their reasons.

So we are already split in our community. One of my concerns has to do, in thinking about where we draw the battle lines; people of color are always doing the under-dog work, and we are the ones who have to go out there and change some laws, so that we could be not left out of the loop. And when you talk to some folks in the people of colors community, they will say, “Well, gay marriage is not an issue for us. Bread and butter is, a job, employment....” But when I listen to white progressive gay leadership, it is just the opposite. So I see it as the broader issues, of here we are, repeating again what the heterosexual communities do, in battling for the goods that

are there. So what are we doing differently? And how are we going to do it differently? To me, that is the challenge, so we do not emulate, all the time, what we have been conditioned in this society to do.

When we were starting to organize the forum in October, we had some veteran AIDS activists say to me, "Look, I feel really burnt by the AIDS work. What happened was that a lot of gay people fought to get people with AIDS covered, and a lot of the rest of us were fighting for universal health care coverage, and felt sold out by the gay community. In doing this work now, part of my personal hope is to always talk about it as a two-pronged issue: the first is that we are affected the same way as all other poor people, and also to highlight the ways that we are affected specifically as queer people. My goal, and I think the goal of a lot of people doing this is not just to address the ways in which we have been affected as queer people that is discriminatory - not just to get transgendered people treated better at workfare sites, so that they are treated the same way as everyone else. [Laughter] But the idea is to do away with workfare sites.

We don't have an answer today.