Badge of Dishonor

When it comes to HIV awareness and prevention, the Boy Scouts are tenderfeet.

August 1, 2006 By Bob Ickes

This August, according to the Pennsylvania State Attorney General's Office, criminal proceedings will begin against an HIV positive assistant scoutmaster near Philadelphia. David Mayberry, 50, allegedly had oral sex with a 14-year-old boy, who is claimed to have performed the act on Mayberry without a condom even though Mayberry knew he was positive. (The boy, not a scout, has since tested negative.) Attorney-general spokesman Nils Frederiksen says that Mayberry, who pleaded not guilty when arraigned, faces up to 20 years in prison on one of the charges alone. Mayberry's attorneys, Jeffrey M. Lindy and Michael Drossner, wouldn't discuss published reports that Mayberry acknowledged his failure to disclose, though Lindy told *POZ*, "We plan a vigorous defense."

Mayberry also faces charges (to which he has also pleaded not guilty) after allegedly arranging to meet, via the Internet, another boy, actually an undercover state agent, at a hotel. None of the boys in Mayberry's troop, however, has alleged wrongdoing.

Few would expect parents to enroll sons in troops run by convicted child predators, regardless of sexual orientation or HIV status. But we wonder whether the Mayberry case is being used by those dangerously unschooled in HIV demographics not only to imply an automatic link between AIDS and homosexuality but to justify the Scouts' refusal to educate its 3.2 million members and staff about the sexual transmission and prevention of HIV.

Op-eds and Mayberry message boards proclaim: "This is exactly why the Scouts prohibit homosexuals from being scout leaders." (In 2000, the Supreme Court ruled that the Boy Scouts could evict an openly gay scoutmaster, James Dale, a former *POZ* employee.)

Boy Scout spokesman Gregg Shields wouldn't link HIV to the gay ban (though, curiously, positive straight scouts and masters are welcome), adding: "We always leave questions of sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases to parents and religious advisers."

By ensuring that the scouts and their masters never get the true AIDS information they need to protect themselves, the organization may fuel a predatory cycle of ignorance, infection and misplaced blame. Many scouts join precisely because they *lack* a parental authority. We can only hope that mom and pop point out that the percentage of gay male infections among the total has

fallen steadily since the epidemic began and that positive people have no larger incidence of predatory behavior.

Could education help the Boy Scouts navigate more likely transmission scenarios between partners of any gender or orientation? If David Mayberry is guilty, punish him—but not PWAs and scouts. Let HIV safety start with the Boy Scout motto: Be prepared.

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