It’s a great personal and professional pleasure to be at the Center for LGBT Social Science and Public Policy. I want to thank everyone here for your tireless efforts on behalf of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. I’ve been very involved in AIDS and LGBT activities both in New York and nationally for much of my career, and it’s wonderful to see many old friends on the program and involved with this organization. It has been a particular honor for me to serve in the Obama Administration over the past year and a half, and to be part of the senior leadership in the Department of Health and Human Services, an agency with a long and distinguished history, and a very exciting present. I bring greetings from Secretary Sebelius and her appreciation as well for the work you do.

Health Care
Today I’d like to give you an overview of some of what we’ve done and some of where we’re going as it affects LGBTQ children, youth and families. But, I’d like to step back for a minute and kind of marvel at a stunning legislative achievement—the Affordable Care Act. It’s truly remarkable that after decades and decades of talking about reforming the American health care system, it has finally happened. The U.S. has joined all the other modern, industrialized nations that have long provided access to comprehensive, affordable health care for every citizen. Now that the first set of benefits are kicking in, we’re really going to witness what a sea change this historic legislation has brought.
Turning back to HHS, there are more concrete examples of our commitment to improving life for LGBTQQ individuals and families.

For instance, Secretary Sebelius recently established a new HHS Coordinating Committee on LGBT issues. Every office is represented by a senior leader. This means that the committee, which is designed to address a high priority at a high level, will be able to do just that. The co-chairs are the Assistant Secretary for Health, Howard Koh, the Assistant Secretary for Aging Kathy Greenlee, and me, representing the Administration for Children and Families.

The very existence of this committee addresses a situation that crops up all too frequently in huge organizations—programs start to occupy their own stovesipes, offices get caught up in day to day resolution of narrowly-focused crises, and even when there are areas of overlap, relevant actors may not talk to each other to. This leads not only to a kind of in-house myopia, but also makes it difficult for advocates to know where to go when you have ideas and feedback for us. I’m pleased that now I can invite you to share those ideas and feedback with this committee that spans the range of HHS programs. You’ll have our collective ear. We’ve already met twice with members of the New Beginnings initiative and other stakeholders to get their input. The dialogue will continue, I assure you.

Now I’d like to focus on my part of the Department, ACF. As you probably know, ACF comprises almost everything after the “and” in Health and Human Services (together with our colleagues in the Administration on Aging, under Kathy Greenlee’s leadership). Our primary mission at the Administration for Children and Families is to run programs that improve social and economic well-being and promote the health and comprehensive development of children. Our programs touch millions of vulnerable people, from the single mother getting job training so that she can support her family, to the bright-eyed 4 year old eager to learn in a Head Start classroom, to the 9 year old child in foster care, desperate for a permanent home, to the teen age girl who has been smuggled into the US as a victim of human trafficking, to the gay teenager who’s run away from home and is living on the streets. Our reach is far and wide.
While ACF can't fight the state-imposed legal limitations on adoption, we are doing all we can to overcome the many other obstacles LGBT people face when they want to create a family by fostering or adopting from foster care. We're doing this because we believe that all children deserve loving, safe, and stable homes, equally, that all families who are capable of providing that should be encouraged and helped to do so, regardless of whether they have two moms or two dads.

LGBT individuals and couples often contact us about adopting children through a program we sponsor called AdoptUsKids, which is aimed at getting adoptive homes for hard-to-place children. We're particularly interested in encouraging their involvement, in fact, we NEED their involvement—the latest statistics tell us that there are almost 115,000 children in foster care ready to be adopted—so we're taking a number of actions that will lead to much more inclusiveness.

• For example, we are developing technical assistance tools, including a training curriculum, to help States, Territories and Tribes serve prospective and current foster and adoptive families who are LGBT. This year, in fact, the Human Rights Campaign held a week-long training session on LGBT issues for AdoptUSKids staff, using the HRC/All Children-All Families curriculum. We’re going to use this curriculum as a model for nationwide distribution.
• We’ve also hired consultants with LGBT expertise—Gary of course being the best example...
• We’re convening LGBT focus groups and surveys of LGBT families, to help us figure out exactly what services they need to foster and adopt successfully.
• We’re reviewing and revising all the publications put out by AdoptUsKids to make sure they include LGBT-friendly concepts and language.
• In June we held a teleconference with a number of child welfare agencies on practice issues that come up when they’re working with LGBT families. Clearly it’s very important that child welfare workers understand the issues and use that knowledge and awareness to improve how they interact with LGBT Americans who want to foster or adopt a child.
a program that we hope will be suitable for replication around the country.

We want to learn what happens from day one to these and to all kids once they enter care. We want to learn more about how they move through and eventually out of the system. We want to learn the best ways to engage children, their families and the communities they live in to achieve permanent homes. The grant to the LA Gay and Lesbian Center demonstrates our commitment to applying all of that on behalf of LGBT youth in the child welfare system.

Bullying
Another issue that been much on everyone’s minds is the bullying of young people who are or who are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. This month we were pained to read of abduction and abominable torture of three men here in New York, solely because they were thought to be gay. We also learned of the suicide of Tyler Clementi who took his own life after his roommate outed him online. This followed the suicide of three other young men and preceded that of yet another. Unfortunately, this happens much too often—research shows that suicide is the leading cause of death among gay male, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth.1

President Obama has expressed his support of gay adolescents whose struggle to accept their identity is made so much worse when they are bullied. The President has recorded a heartfelt video message appearing on the itgetsbetterproject.com website. In the video the President states, “I don’t know what it’s like to be picked on for being gay, but I do know what it’s like to grow up feeling that sometimes you don’t belong.” He urges teens to reach out to those who love and care about them just the way they are, and assures them that, “Things will get better. More than that, in time, you’ll see your differences are a source of pride, a source of strength...”

This unequivocal and caring statement shows us that we have support at the highest level to do everything in our power to prevent these

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1 Gibson, Paul (2009) reprinted from We Are Family (online)
We look forward to great outcomes from all of these groups. Their very existence is a sign that we’re putting our principles about addressing LGBT issues into action.

**Conclusion**
In a short time, we’ve made some very significant positive changes in the health and human services picture for the LGBT community. I want to reassure you that the fire and the drive toward change are very much alive, along with all-important backup from the White House. The conversation has begun. With your help, it will only continue and intensify.

But, we have only begun, and there is so much more we need to do. I hope you know that you have our commitment to ensuring that the LGBT community – indeed, the LGBT communities – are always in our minds as we develop policies and programs to expand access to quality health care and social services to all Americans. We value your counsel, we invite your opinions, and most of all, we look forward to achieving more milestones in the journey toward equality and justice in the days ahead.

Thank you.