

Nancy Flaxman
Testimony for AoA OAA Reauthorization
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San Francisco, California

My name is Nancy Flaxman. I am 63 years old, the first of the Baby Boomers. I am a social worker, a parent, and a grandparent. And I am a lesbian. My partner and I have been together 21 years, becoming domestic partners when it became available, marrying in San Francisco in 2004, and crying together when that was revoked. We married again in 2008, and we are now one of the 18,000 legally married same gender couples in CA.

Despite our years of love and commitment, our relationship is not recognized by the federal government. We do not have the aging safety net of over 1,000 federal benefits that heterosexual seniors enjoy. And the chances are that if we were to travel out of state and one of us got sick, we would not be able to visit one another in the hospital. If one of us died, the other would not even be able to get the body for burial because we are not considered family.

Though we are a long way off from federal recognition, there are ways that the Administration on Aging can not only honor our dignity as human beings but also improve our health and well being as aging lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. From my work for the past 20 years with and on behalf of LGBT seniors, I can report:

1. Most LGBT seniors are in the closet and are not accessing mainstream senior services that are essential to healthy aging for fear of what will happen if their sexual orientation or gender identity is revealed. AND
2. Mainstream senior service providers lack the knowledge to provide the culturally competent services that are essential to reach LGBT seniors.

Increasing accessibility must begin with required training for all senior service providers. We have the curriculum and the Best Practices, and we know they work.

In 2006 California lawmakers passed The Older Californians Equality and Protection Act, which requires the California Department of Aging to account for the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender elders in its services.

Cultural competency will not happen overnight nor with one staff training. I urge you to include an ongoing commitment to LGBT cultural competency in your requirements for all AAA's. Thank you.