



## **Chicago House Among Founding Membership of LGBTQ Poverty Collaborative**

*Building a Movement for LGBTQ Economic Security through Policy, Research and Social Initiatives*

**Chicago, IL** – On Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup> from Noon-1:30pm, **Chicago House**, the first organization in the Midwest to provide housing for people with HIV and AIDS, along with committed, passionate individuals from across the nation representing the **Williams Institute**, the **Center for American Progress**, and the **Vaid Group LLC**, hosted a donor briefing on their *LGBTQ Poverty Collaborative* at the offices of Clark Hill PLC. The Chicago briefing, preceded by the Equality Caucus Congressional Briefing of the 114th Congress hosted by incoming vice-chair of the Equality Caucus Representative Mike Quigley from Illinois on March 4 in Washington, D.C., was the first of its kind in Illinois to introduce LGBTQ poverty as a major policy, research and social justice priority.

The briefing featured **Dr. M.V. Lee Badgett**, Founder and Director of the Center for Public Policy and Administration, Professor of Economics at University of Amherst, and Research Director Distinguished Scholar at The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law; **Laura E. Durso**, Director of LGBT Research and Communications Project for the Center for American Progress; **The Reverend Stan Sloan**, Chief Executive Officer of Chicago House and Social Service Agency; **Urvashi Vaid**, President and Founder of The Vaid Group LLC and Senior Fellow and Director of the Engaging Tradition Project at the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law, Columbia Law School; and **Bianca Wilson**, Senior Scholar of Public Policy at The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.

Over 30 representatives from foundations and corporations were in attendance at the meeting, including but not limited to, the BMO Harris Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, Chicago Foundation for Women, MacArthur Foundation, McCormick Foundation, Pierce Family Foundation, Kinowerks Foundation, Prince Charitable Trust and Polk Brothers Foundation. Jim McDonough on behalf of **Alphawood Foundation committed \$100,000** over 2 years and Jay Paul Deratany of **The Deratany Firm committed \$50,000** over 3 years to launch the efforts.

Spearheading a social movement to address economic insecurity within the LGBTQ community, the *LGBTQ Poverty Collaborative* was founded in June 2014 to articulate an LGBTQ poverty agenda, link the LGBTQ movement more closely with poverty-focused advocates, increase support and commitment to fighting LGBTQ poverty among LGBTQ donors, and increase the engagement of the LGBTQ movement on economic justice policy issues in general. Through research, policy development and coalition building, the *Collaborative* proposes a two-year program to increase a focus on poverty within the LGBTQ community as a policy priority of the LGBTQ movement.

Opening the meeting, **The Reverend Stan Sloan**, set the stage for the day's proceedings by acknowledging how the LGBTQ movement arrived at this moment of vast inequality. "LGBTQ people living in poverty are invisible. There's a reason for that: the LGBTQ movement has made faster progress than any movement in the history of the United States on civil rights. And we did so by allowing the media's images of us as wealthy and powerful to be our main narrative, despite the fact that in reality we are disproportionately affected by poverty. As we continue making progress toward marriage equality and toward medical advancements in HIV treatment, it is time to help our friends living in poverty in LGBTQ to gain the visibility they need to move out of poverty, and to break down the external systems of prejudice and discrimination that keep them trapped therein. It is also time to help our community realize the depth of need, and to have 'LGBTQ itself take better care of those in need in LGBTQ.'"

Research has shown that same-sex couples and LGBTQ-identified people experience a number of economic disparities compared to different-sex couples and non-LGBTQ people (Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum, 2013). **Lee Badgett**, citing statistics from the US Census Bureau, reported that same-sex female couples have the highest rates of living below the poverty level (earn less than \$15,930 annually for a family of 2), and these rates have risen over the last decade from 6.9% in 2000 to 7.9% in 2012.

Why are LGBT-identified people more vulnerable to poverty? **Laura Durso** highlighted gaps in policy and the law. Specifically, a lack of protection, refusal to recognize LGBTQ families, and failure to protect LGBT students lead to marginalized status and ultimately poverty among LGBTQ communities. Indicators of economic disparities also include food insecurity and housing instability. With regard to food insecurity, more than one in four LGBTQ individuals (29%), approximately 2.4 million people, experienced a time in the last year when they did not have enough money to feed themselves or their family, compared to 18% of non-LGBTQ individuals (Gates, 2014). More than four in ten LGB adults aged 18-44 who were raising children (43%) live in poverty, and approximately 650,000 LGBTQ people participate in SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] (Williams Institute, 2014).

**Bianca Wilson** next spoke to the intersections of race, parenthood status, and geographic location as contributing factors to economic insecurity, where an individual facing LGBTQ status along with another barrier has a higher likelihood of experiencing poverty. For example, same-sex female, African American couples have the highest likelihood of living in poverty as compared to their white counterparts in different-sex couples. In the area of housing, a survey of people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco revealed that 29 percent (at all age levels) identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (Erica Goode, New York Times; December 2, 2013). And LGBT youth are represented in the foster system at double their representation in the general population (Williams Institute, 2014).

Closing the program, **Urvashi Vaid** fervently urged donors to “work on inequality as much as we work on equality.” Uniting the movements of economic security and LGBTQ equality, the *LGBTQ Poverty Collaborative* is committed to “making the invisible visible.” To that end, the group intends to execute a three-part project that: (1) Develops an economic policy agenda under the leadership of the **Center for American Progress** and **The Vaid Group**, (2) Improves the knowledge base with research expertise provided by **The Williams Institute**, and (3) Shifts public perception through a virtual campaign executed by **Chicago House and Social Service Agency**. In order to achieve the long-term goals of the *LGBTQ Poverty Collaborative*, the group aims to raise \$864,388 to support the two-year initiative.

To learn more about the *LGBT Poverty Collaborative* or to donate, please contact Jim LoBianco, Chief Development Officer for Chicago House and Social Service Agency at 773-248-5200 x 308 or [jlobianco@chicagohouse.org](mailto:jlobianco@chicagohouse.org).

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