



Letter to the editor

RESPONSE TO BAY AREA REPORTER

From: Joe Hawkins, CEO/Co-founder

The Open Forum editorial published in the Bay Area Reporter dated June 20-26, omitted the fact that in my open letter to the press, I stated that our board members, staff and volunteers from the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center, initially went to the Oakland City Council meeting to show support for Our Family Coalition (OFC). OFC created a Facebook invite to the community, requesting that people show up to support them after their agency was defunded.

We attended this meeting to show support for OFC and to advocate for funding for LGBTQ family services in Oakland.

This is not simply a matter of "he said she said" and community leaders who are people of color "squabbling" over who provides the most services as your editorial stated. We do not need to debate what was said because these comments were captured on Oakland's KTOP community video and are available for public viewing on the city's website and on our website at the link below. Even comments restated in the BAR's open forum editorial are inaccurate when compared with the video.

<https://www.oaklandlgbtqcenter.org/copy-of-press>

We were shocked to hear an Our Family Coalition (OFC) employee emphatically state to the Oakland City Council and our community at-large, that "Only Our Family Coalition (provides services to LGBTQ families), not LGBTQ Oakland Center". This is a false statement and injurious to our two organization's working collaboratively.

The Oakland LGBTQ Community Center is an Oakland based non-profit dedicated to enhancing and sustaining the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals, our families and allies, by providing educational, social, health & wellness related activities, programs and services. Our Family Coalition does needed work in our community and is based in San Francisco.

As a long time community organizer who is the co-founder of both Oakland Pride and the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center, if I remained silent about these false statements, I would be doing a disservice to the many volunteers, activist, and community organizers here in Oakland who helped pave the way for LGBTQ services in our city without any type of city funding.

OFC staff made public (city video recorded), false statements to the community about the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center. As the CEO, it is my responsibility to clarify these false statements and I would expect the Bay Area Reporter, a news source, to report the facts accurately.

As a resident of Oakland for over 30 years, a gay dad who knows firsthand the challenges of being a single parent and out black gay man, I am keenly aware of the need for culturally competent LGBTQ family support services in our city. The Oakland LGBTQ Community Center currently partners with many other service organizations in Oakland, as we work to help LGBTQ youth and families and we look forward to working with OFC in the future.

The Oakland LGBTQ Community Center was recently recommended for funding by the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth Planning and Oversight Committee. This was a highly competitive grant application process and on June 18, 2019, our organization was approved by the City Council for a grant to serve LGBTQ youth. We are looking forward to launching our first ever city funded LGBTQ program. Our goal is to expand our youth and family services programming at the center and we are grateful for the funding support from the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth and the voters of Measure K, for this opportunity.