

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER AND SHEILA KUEHL

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Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner Collection of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data

In the United States, Medical Examiner and Coroner’s offices are charged with investigating deaths that occur under unusual or specific circumstances through post-mortem examinations. The work of the Medical Examiner and Coroner’s is vital, as it often is used to gather evidence and information that can be used in a criminal proceeding. However, this work can also highlight disparities in mortality rates, and provide valuable insight that can be used to guide policies, resources, and law enforcement efforts to protect at-risk communities.

Many Medical Examiner and Coroner’s offices, including our own, do not currently collect and aggregate data pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity. In the absence of this data, it is impossible to detect the presence of disparities in mortality rates of the LGBTQ community. By tracking this data, it will allow us to better understand these disparities and develop policies that seek to address them at the County level.

According to a 2016 report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, LGBTQ youth seriously contemplate suicide at almost three times the rate of heterosexual youth. A national survey issued by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that 40% of transgender adults reported having made a suicide attempt – 92% of these individuals reported having attempted suicide before the age of 25. The Trevor Project, the world’s largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people, found in a 2019 national survey of more than 34,000 LGBTQ youth that 39% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with more than half of transgender and non-binary youth having seriously considered it. The same study found that 14% of LGB youth had a suicide attempt in the previous 12 months, rising to 29% for transgender and nonbinary youth.¹ Data pertaining to suicide completion among our LGBTQ community is unavailable because sexual orientation and gender identity data are currently not reflected in death records.

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¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2019/?section=Suicidality-Mental-Health>

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) statistics show that in 2017, 7,175 hate crimes were reported, 1,130 of which were based on sexual orientation bias and 119 on gender identity bias. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, one in four transgender people have been assaulted simply because they are transgender. The report went on to say that of these incidents, the majority of deadly attacks against transgender people are against women of color.

Los Angeles County recognizes the importance of collecting sexual orientation and gender identity data in our Medical Examiner-Coroner's Office. We also recognize the importance of department wide training to implement this change, to ensure cultural competency and respect of confidentiality in these efforts.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Medical Examiner-Coroner, in coordination with pertinent stakeholders, to do the following:

1. Develop an implementation plan and timeline for the collection of sexual orientation and gender identity data, to be included in the annual Medical Examiner-Coroner reports, with a focus on LGBTQ suicide rates, violent deaths, and hate crime incidents.
2. Engage subject matter experts to develop a plan to incorporate department wide training of personnel on the collection of sexual orientation and gender identity data, which should include cultural sensitivity training and other best practices.
3. Report back to the board with quarterly progress updates on these efforts, leading up to full implementation.

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AGN. NO.