



September 8, 2021

Michael L. Parson
57th Governor of Missouri
Office of Governor Michael L. Parson
P.O. Box 720
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Governor Michael L. Parson:

The National Council on Public History (NCPH) calls upon the Governor of Missouri to act quickly to reinstate the exhibition *Making History: Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights* at the Missouri State Museum at the Capitol. In targeting *Making History* for removal, its opponents have perpetuated the very pattern of discrimination against the LGBTQ community—and face the same determined, organized resistance to that discrimination—that the exhibition carefully documents across decades. Moreover, the action of removing the exhibition effectively silences and censors scholarship.

The exhibit grew out of a public history course taught by Dr. Christopher Cantwell at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2016, and the resulting physical exhibit has traveled across Missouri since the summer of 2017. In 2018, NCPH recognized *Making History* with its Student Project Award, an award which honors a project recognized beyond the classroom as a contribution to public history. One year later, in 2019, NCPH and many other organizations marked the 50th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York’s Greenwich Village, which is often described as a catalytic event in the gay liberation movement. The history of gay rights activism and organizing before Stonewall and beyond New York is less well known but no less important. *Making History* engages this history, shining a light on vital activism in Kansas City. When the National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations met for two days there in 1966, it was the first national gathering of gay rights organizations in United States history. As *Making History* shows, the Kansas City meeting helped to lay the groundwork for the movement for LGBTQ rights, one of the signal social movements of the twentieth century and beyond. This history deserves to be visible and known, especially among residents of the state where it occurred. As Missouri State Senator Greg Razer [observed](#), “The story that that exhibit told is the story of how I get to stand on the Senate floor in the first place. Thirty years ago there wouldn’t be an openly gay man in the state Senate.”

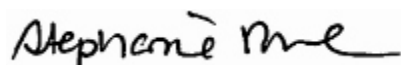
As a traveling exhibition designed to visit sites all around Missouri, *Making History* elevates the visibility of community archives in the region. LGBTQ history was for decades excluded from mainstream historical institutions, including formal archives. Community members took it upon themselves to become

historians and archivists, collecting documents, caring for artifacts, and keeping stories alive for years. In recognizing *Making History* for the Student Project of the Year Award, NCPH expressed appreciation for the way in which student curators from the University of Missouri-Kansas City partnered with community archivists and historians from the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, LGBT-KC, and other organizations to develop the exhibition. As NCPH's citation for the award put it, this process stands as a model for "creative, collaborative public history, connecting community historians with academic historians." The exhibition's student curators worked with local LGBTQ community members "not as experts but as allies," recognizing that the latter "had been engaged in research and documentation for decades." The exhibition thus demonstrates, with both its process of development and content, "that communities make history both inside and outside mainstream institutions and that public historians' support and collaboration can elevate these stories and their own practice."

The NCPH citation makes clear that *Making History* is rooted in years of community history-keeping. The exhibition literally presents historical documentation in the form of digitized photographs and documents representing seventy years of LGBTQ history in Kansas City and beyond. The narrative text on each exhibition panel is grounded in research in the collections of several archives, libraries, and community organizations. By incorporating these primary materials in a set of traveling, easily displayable panels, *Making History* makes history accessible to new and broader audiences throughout Missouri.

When peoples' histories are marginalized, people often become marginalized as well. Movements for equal rights are for that reason also movements for the equal right to document, share, and exhibit previously marginalized histories. For LGBTQ Americans, the struggle for equality and voice continues and, as the removal of *Making History* from the Missouri State Museum shows, so does the struggle to make LGBTQ history visible in the face of censorship. This removal of *Making History* also endangers any future public exploration of any LGBTQ history in Missouri. We urge you, as Governor, to act quickly to reinstate the exhibition *Making History: Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights* at the Missouri State Museum at the Capitol. For those interested in learning more, a digital version of the exhibit is available at <https://info.umkc.edu/makinghistory/>.

On behalf of the National Council on Public History,



Stephanie Rowe
Executive Director