



Subject: Letter of concern regarding workplace conditions and site usage at the Museum of the American Revolution

June 23, 2023

Dr. R. Scott Stephenson
Museum of the American Revolution
101 South Third Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Dr. Stephenson—

The mission of National Council on Public History includes fostering critical reflection on historical practice as well as advocating on behalf of history and historians. It is in this capacity that we wish to address events unfolding at the Museum of the American Revolution (MoAR). NCPH promotes sound, ethical public history practice that incorporates thorough research and current scholarship and responds meaningfully and honestly to the concerns and perspectives of involved communities. We support open dialogue and informed discussion about history’s relationship to contemporary debates and oppose policies, positions, practices, or actions that hinder or suppress that practice. Museum leadership signed an agreement with Moms for Liberty (M4L) in late 2022 allowing M4L to host their “Welcome to Philadelphia Reception” there as part of their Joyful Warrior National Summit to be held June 29-July 2, 2023.

The record of activities for M4L is one that directly endangers ethical public history practice. M4L activities include support for book bans and the removal of school curricula that tell a complete and factual history that includes members of historically excluded and marginalized communities such as BIPOC and LGBTQ+ individuals. The Southern Poverty Law Center has added Moms for Liberty to its list of extremist groups and went as far as to compare M4L to “pro-segregationist parent groups that flourished in the wake of the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. That decision forced schools across the U.S. to integrate, but it also gave fire to a movement to undermine public education.” M4L also has a record of engaging with white supremacist groups to intimidate school boards. By hosting Moms for Liberty, the Museum of the American Revolution is enabling M4L to spread a message that is antithetical to ethical public history practice, especially when it comes to engaging audiences with an authentic representation of the past, promoting critical thinking, and countering those who seek to distort history in contemporary public discourse.

Further, museum leadership have not adequately addressed the valid personal and professional concerns of their staff. Staff was not consulted in this decision and is being denied effective and adequate recourse within the institution to address fundamental objections to their workplace hosting an organization that dehumanizes LGBTQ+ people; seeks via book bans to suppress historical knowledge about BIPOC and queer lives; and undermines the important public history work staff performs on behalf of the museum. As an advocate for public historians *themselves*—not merely the concept of public history or even public history institutions—NCPH strongly objects to the imposition of such intolerable and dehumanizing working conditions. While staff may not be required to work during the event, the opening up of their workplace to a group whose actions and rhetoric further white supremacist and anti-LGBTQ+ agendas, with disregard for their abundant and vocal objections, puts those staff members in danger and is not acceptable in a public history workplace.

We fear the detrimental effect these actions will have on museum staff as they continue to make more full and inclusive histories accessible to their communities. The museum recently opened *Black Founders: The Forten Family of Philadelphia* during 2023 Black History Month. The staff have worked to create relationships with the Black community in authentic ways; by hosting M4L, the museum is undermining those relationships and jeopardizing the staff's ability to conduct future work in these crucial areas.

We encourage all public history institutions to think critically about the groups they allow to rent or use their space. In a recent article for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a Museum of the American Revolution spokesperson said, "Because fostering understanding within a democratic society is so central to our mission, rejecting visitors on the basis of ideology would be antithetical to our purpose." This framing of the issue is inaccurate because intimidation tactics, historical erasure, and dehumanization are methods of forcefully shutting down democratic understanding and discussion, not engaging in it. In renting space at MoAR, moreover, M4L is not making itself available for a dialogue about ideological differences facilitated by the institution; rather, it is using the institution's name as a platform for its agenda. MoAR appears to suggest that its mission extends to such actions, which provide legitimacy for groups that seek to censor and erase already-marginalized histories and to misuse history in service to deleterious aims. To do so, however, is at odds with the work of MoAR staff to make the institution a home for more complete and inclusive histories that foster a better understanding of our shared past.

Sincerely,
The NCPH Board of Directors
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