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WILLIAM WAY LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER PRESENTS SPEAKING OUT FOR EQUALITY: THE CONSTITUTION, GAY RIGHTS, AND THE SUPREME COURT AT THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER THIS SUMMER

Exhibition Commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the First Gay Rights March, Held on Philadelphia’s Independence Mall on July Fourth

Philadelphia (March 10, 2015) – Planned to coincide with Gay Pride Month in June and the 50th anniversary the first in a series gay rights marches, which took place on the Fourth of July on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, the William Way LGBT Community Center will present Speaking Out for Equality: The Constitution, Gay Rights, and the Supreme Court, a new exhibition at the National Constitution Center. Opening Friday, June 5, 2015, and continuing through Labor Day, Monday, September 7, 2015, Speaking Out for Equality utilizes pivotal court cases, artifacts and personal stories to chronicle the decades-long debate over gay rights, a debate that ultimately brought issues of LGBT equality before the Supreme Court.

“On July 4, 1965, LGBT activists picketed for justice in front of Philadelphia’s Independence Hall. Clad in suits and dresses to appear ‘normal,’ they carried posters that demanded equality for gays and lesbians in a society that treated them as criminals and deviants,” said Chris Bartlett, executive director, William Way LGBT Community Center. “The public demonstrations, which were called Annual Reminder protests and would last until 1969, were sparked by one person’s failed effort to bring a discrimination case before the Supreme Court. They would become the first sustained national effort to focus attention on the discrimination faced by gay people and became a catalyst for LGBT Americans to organize for equality,” he said.


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“This exhibit is historic in many respects,” said Bartlett. ‘It is the first time that LGBT history, viewed through a Constitutional frame, is being explored at a national museum. It’s also historic given the time frame of the American LGBT civil rights debate: with a major LGBT civil rights case to be handed down by the United States Supreme Court while the exhibit is open in June. For July 4, 2015, Independence Mall will be ringed with a major LGBT civil rights exhibit and partner exhibits at other institutions on the mall. LGBT history is truly coming of age.”

“We are pleased to participate in Reminder 2015 and partner with the William Way LGBT Community Center on Speaking Out for Equality,” said Vince Stango, chief operating officer, National Constitution Center. “As the Museum of We the People, we continue to serve as a center of exhibits and materials on the history and contemporary significance of the Constitution. The exhibition will inform about pivotal Supreme Court cases in the fight for gay rights and create a platform for discussion about the 1st Amendment, the 5th Amendment and the 14th Amendment,” he said.

Visitors to the exhibition will be greeted by images of Annual Reminder protests as well as media projections of current LGBT issues told through film, headlines and photographs, and then proceed through six sections.

1. In section one, “Being Gay in Mid-20th Century America: A Climate of Fear and Intimidation,” which includes media, personal stories, and law enforcement accounts, visitors explore the extent of discrimination faced by LGBT people and learn about the risk of being visible.

2. In section two, “Frank Kameny, 1957: A Fired Government Employee Challenges the Status Quo,” tells the story of the Lavender Scare, a time when government employees believed to be homosexual could be fined at will, and a rising astronomist who is fired and fights back. Kameny’s petition to the Supreme Court ignited a sustained public debate over LGBT rights.

3. The right to speak out – guaranteed by the 1st Amendment – became a springboard in the LGBT movement for equality and is the subject of section three, “1960s Protest: Testing the Promise of the 1st Amendment.” The exhibition will explore the rising visibility and activism in the gay community during this tumultuous decade.

4. As the gay rights movement emerged into public consciousness and the call for LGBT equality gained wider support, the debate over gay rights increasingly played out in the

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courts. In section four, “Coming Out for Liberty: Amendments V, XIV, and the Response to Bowers v. Hardwick,” visitors learn how a 1987 Supreme Court ruling helped fuel the change in focus for LGBT people, who would increasingly shed the cloak of invisibility to seek equality.

5. “A Debate Over Dignity: Amendment XIV,” addresses the timeframe after the Bowers v. Hardwick Supreme Court decision when LGBT people turned to their neighbors, employers and communities. This section explores the ongoing debate over legal protections for LGBT individuals and families from the 1990s to today.


The National Constitution Center is located at 525 Arch Street on Philadelphia’s Independence Mall. The Center is open 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, until 6:00 p.m. on Saturday and from noon to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. General admission is $14.50 for adults, $13 for seniors, students with ID, and youth (ages 13-18), $8 for children (ages 4-12), and is free for active military. For more information, call 215-409-6700 or visit constitutioncenter.org.

About the William Way LGBT Community Center
The William Way LGBT Community Center seeks to encourage, support, and advocate for the well-being and acceptance of sexual and gender minorities through service, recreational, educational, and cultural programming. For more information, call 215-732-2220 or visit waygay.org.
About the National Constitution Center
The National Constitution Center in Philadelphia is the Museum of We the People, America’s Town Hall, and a Headquarters for Civic Education. As the Museum of We the People, the National Constitution Center brings the United States Constitution to life for visitors of all ages and inspires active citizenship by celebrating the American constitutional tradition. The museum features interactive exhibitions, engaging theatrical performances, and original documents of freedom. As the only institution established by Congress to “disseminate information about the United States Constitution on a non-partisan basis,” the National Constitution Center serves as a Headquarters for Civic Education—offering cutting-edge learning resources including the premier online Interactive Constitution. As America’s Town Hall, the National Constitution Center hosts timely constitutional conversations uniting distinguished leaders, scholars, authors, and journalists from across the political spectrum. For more information, call 215-409-6700 or visit constitutioncenter.org.

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