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May 4, 2022

Ms. Nancy Moses
Chair, PA Historical & Museum Commission
300 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Ms. Moses:

I write to you in follow up to my correspondence of December 20, 2021, wherein I requested the removal of the Richard Schlegel historical marker at 205 State Street in Harrisburg. In addition to responding to the child molestation defenses and unfounded political allegations made by officers of the LGBT Center of Central PA, the sponsor of the marker, I would also like to highlight additional passages from Mr. Schlegel's interview that should disqualify him from personal recognition on a historical marker. It should be noted that the interview transcript was "extensively annotated" by Mr. Schlegel, so it is reasonable to conclude that it is an accurate reflection of his thoughts and opinions as conveyed to the interviewer.

Amanda Arbour, Executive Director of the LGBT Center of Central PA, and Barry Loveland, chair of its History Project, sent letters to you dated April 20, 2022 and April 16, 2022, respectively, opposing the retirement of this marker. I provide a highlight of some of their statements with regards to Mr. Schlegel's description of a relationship with a neighbor boy in 1943:

Arbour: "both were participating in the activity voluntarily"

Are they really suggesting an 11 or 12 year old could consent to being preyed upon by a 16-year old Mr. Schlegel, who says quite directly that he himself "was the aggressor" and "orchestrating the whole thing"?

Arbour: "the age gap (if his estimation of the other boy's age was correct) makes it inappropriate and we do not condone this behavior. It is important to note that in the oral history Richard Schlegel was unsure of the boy's exact age at the time."

Mr. Schlegel clearly states he was sixteen and the other boy "wouldn't be more than eleven, twelve maybe." Are they actually arguing there's enough doubt that maybe, if this boy were thirteen, it would then be okay that Mr. Schlegel manipulated him into this behavior?

Regardless of whether this conduct, which lasted in Mr. Schlegel's recollection "over a period of some months," should be dismissed as merely, in Ms. Arbour's words, "problematic sexual behavior amongst youth," what is most revealing about Mr. Schlegel's character is that, in 1993 at the age of 66 when he gave this interview, he expressed no remorse about putting the younger child in this situation.

Instead, Mr. Schlegel conveyed regret at not physically touching the boy, saying “I certainly wouldn’t make that mistake twice, because he was so cute.” I’m at a loss for how anyone could defend Mr. Schlegel’s adult perspective on this matter, which, if it did perhaps change before his death in 2006 as Ms. Arbour suggests could be the case, he apparently did not convey it to be included as a supplement to this interview, despite writing “many letters” to the interviewer in the subsequent eleven years. I therefore would argue, contrary to Mr. Loveland’s assertion that “there is not enough information or evidence to find his behavior ‘reprehensible’”, there is in fact no evidence disputing his own personal account that I believe most reasonable persons would deem reprehensible.

Ms. Arbour and Mr. Loveland go on to say that my opposition to this marker retirement is a “politically-motivated attack” and an effort to “cancel LGBTQ+ history.” If shining a light on reprehensible, possibly criminal, behavior (even for the contemporaneous cultural norms of the time period being addressed by the marker) is politically motivated, then there are many district attorneys in this state doing the same thing every day as they seek to prosecute wrongdoing. And, far from canceling anything, I am merely highlighting information in his own words that I believe must be weighed against Mr. Schlegel’s deservedness of personal recognition on a historical marker and his description as a “trail-blazing activist” rather than, perhaps, an “unrepentant child molester.” As a Catholic, I am disgusted with the priests in my church who sexually abused children entrusted with their care and I don’t think they deserve to be put on a pedestal, so I am utterly perplexed about why the LGBT Center would rally around Mr. Schlegel.

In addition to the concerns about Mr. Schlegel discussed in my original correspondence with you, which I believe are more than sufficient to retire this marker, I would also bring to your attention, if you did not review the entire, lengthy interview, other disturbing admissions he made:

1. Theft of other college students’ jock straps – “my jock strap fantasy continued. And my god I was accumulating a mountain of jock straps. I didn’t know what the hell to do with them. I finally burned them, most of them. But this was pure thievery. I stole them. Because I didn’t get the same charge out of buying a jock strap as I did out of taking somebody’s.”
2. Making light of a victim of underage pornography who was, by an associate of Mr. Schlegel, anally penetrated with a broomstick and photographed – “The kid didn’t seem to object, but that didn’t make any difference.” Mr. Schlegel did, however, express his continued sympathy for his associate, the pornographer who was convicted and served six years in prison.
3. Being “outraged” that the same associate was photographing boys “too young” and, in the case of one boy, knowing that “he was diddling this poor kid when he was just, just too young,” yet not reporting it to authorities but instead continuing to collaborate and travel with this man, whose photographs he described as “just kiddie nudes,” not “kiddie porn.” Again, as a 66-year-old at the time of the interview who had an opportunity to reflect on events that took place twenty years earlier, Mr. Schlegel still seems to be quite accepting of this child pornography, saying “there wasn’t this national or international obsession with molesting kids at that point” in time.
4. Expressing a terroristic threat towards a former public official, Leroy Zimmerman, a Dauphin County District Attorney and later State Attorney General—“Remember I have this block about Zimmerman because I thought of even killing that man. And I think I would have the capacity, even today, if the opportunity was presented, to kill him.”

These are not political matters about which there should be any dispute. I don't doubt that Mr. Schlegel faced discrimination in his life for engaging in homosexual conduct, and he undeniably played a role in building case law on job discrimination as well as founding a Janus Society chapter in central Pennsylvania. But these deeds don't excuse all his behaviors or statements, stories that comprise a sizeable percentage of this interview, that, again, I believe most Pennsylvanians would consider reprehensible and make him undeserving of recognition on a historical marker. If the LGBT Center of Central PA wants to celebrate Mr. Schlegel, that is up to them, but I do not think it should be officially sanctioned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and sit in the shadow of the State Capitol.

Mr. Loveland asks, "what other LGBTQ+ history-themed historical markers will he go after next"? The answer, of course, is none, unless, as in this case, the subject does not deserve recognition. It seems Mr. Loveland already forgot that another marker recognizing former Gov. Milton Shapp's LGBTQ+ non-discrimination efforts was dedicated the same day as the Schlegel marker. I have not and will not be asking for its removal. It's not about LGBTQ+ or sexual orientation at all, but about honoring someone who, by his own admission, we know to have been involved in, and dismissive of, child sexual abuse and child pornography. In the scenario envisioned by Mr. Loveland, is that the sort of person we would want "a sixteen year old boy walking by this marker, perhaps on a school trip to visit the Capitol and the State Museum of Pennsylvania, who is just in the process of realizing he is gay and struggling with coming out" to look to as a role model and "pioneer"? I certainly hope we could all agree on that answer.

While the Schlegel monument is the immediate issue, I do raise a concern about how the PHMC is currently determining what markers to erect, modify or retire. I am quite frankly surprised that the PHMC's review of the application for the Schlegel monument would not have identified this troubling interview, as a quick Google search of "Richard Schlegel LGBTQ" returns it as a top hit. I surely think some alarm bells should have gone off before now that would have identified the potential subject of the marker as having committed these acts. I would certainly like to hear from you how this transpired and whether any process changes are being implemented.

I look forward to the PHMC's June 1 meeting, where I would appreciate an opportunity to address the Commission members during deliberation regarding action on this marker. Thank you.

Sincerely,



John M. DiSanto

cc: Andrea Lowery, Executive Director, PHMC