

September 13, 2021

Governor Michael L. Parson
Office of the Governor
State of Missouri
PO Box 720
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Governor Parson:

The American Historical Association (AHA) most emphatically recommends that you reconsider your decision to remove the exhibition [Making History: Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights](#) from the Missouri State Museum. The removal of the exhibition and its relocation to a remote and less accessible alternate location censors historical scholarship, threatens the integrity of historical work in the state of Missouri, and perpetuates the kinds of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people that the exhibition documents. The exhibition should be re-installed in the State Museum as soon as possible.

An exhibition is a work of scholarship. *Making History* adheres closely to the AHA's [Standards for Museum Exhibits Dealing with Historical Subjects](#): it is grounded in historical research, included multiple stakeholders in its development, and acknowledges the existence of competing viewpoints on the subject. Moreover, the exhibit has received widespread professional recognition, including federal funding from Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area and awards from both the National Council on Public History and the Midwestern History Association.

Other than a legislative aide's critique of the very idea of an exhibition on LGBTQ+ history in Missouri, we are unaware of any substantive criticism that could possibly have generated this misguided decision. We have read in standard media accounts that you have claimed that procedures weren't followed, in particular approval by the Board of Public Buildings. Careful research, however, shows that such approval does not appear in the minutes of board meetings since at least 2015. Not surprisingly, we can conclude only that your decision represents an act of blatant censorship. This breach of ethics is an embarrassment to the State of Missouri, and an affront to the qualified professionals who serve on the staff of the Missouri State Museum.

The removal of *Making History* from the State Museum exhibition hall and its relocation to an obviously less visible location with reduced accessibility diminishes the ability of state residents and visitors to learn important aspects of Missouri history. We are aware from news reports that the exhibition generated some controversy, and that your office received communications critical of its content. In a democracy, disagreement is healthy. When that disagreement relates to history, the essential foundation of the conversation lies in the quality and integrity of historical scholarship. Censorship undermines both quality and integrity. Your removal of this exhibition from its initial and appropriate

location sends a message to history and museum professionals across the state (and beyond) about the commitment of Missouri officials to honest and inclusive history education.

This particular form of censorship also implies that the topic itself, and hence the people whose stories are told in the exhibition, should not be a part of the state's civic and cultural life. By excluding this high-quality, professionally researched and produced historical exhibition from the State Museum, you articulate a vision of the state that we hope you do not intend: that LGBTQ+ Americans are not worthy of recognition or inclusion in the state of Missouri.

Surely that is not your intent. We therefore expect that you will restore *Making History* to its original site in the Missouri State Museum exhibition hall.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Jones
President



James R. Grossman
Executive Director

cc: Aaron Willard, Chief of Staff