



July 19, 2012

Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Tierney,

We are writing to ask the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to reconsider its decision regarding the prospective landmarking of 186 Spring Street, an imminently-threatened, nearly 190-year-old house within the proposed South Village Historic District.

We understand that on July 10, 2012, LPC spokesperson Elisabeth de Bourbon told *New York Times* reporter David Dunlap that "186 Spring Street 'doesn't rise to the level of an individual landmark' because 'so few of its details and materials remain'" (City Room blog, July 11, 2012). It has subsequently come to the attention of many people, including us, that the building has previously unrecognized historical and cultural significance in connection to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) and HIV/AIDS activism and history.

As the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation has detailed, 186 Spring Street was home to some of the leaders of early LGBT rights and HIV/AIDS advocacy movements and was the founding location of several of the foremost LGBT equality organizations that endure today.

In the early 1970's the house functioned as a "gay commune," welcoming activists who lived collectively. During that time, Jim Owles, a legendary LGBT activist, who in 1973 became New York City's first openly-gay candidate for public office, resided there. Mr. Owles's legacy includes co-founding Gay Activists Alliance (1969); Gay Independent Democrats (1974), the City's first LGBT Democratic Club which continues nearly 40 years later as Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats; and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (1985), a national organization that carries on his work today.

During this same era of activism, Arnie Kantrowitz also resided at 186 Spring Street. Kantrowitz was an early secretary and vice-president of the Gay Activists Alliance, a co-founder

of Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and is a renowned LGBT writer and academic. Notably, Kantrowitz was among the first to teach courses in gay literature, beginning in 1973 with “Homosexuals and Literature” at Richmond College in Staten Island.

Through the early 1980’s, 186 Spring Street was home to Bruce Voeller, a leader of the first national gay and lesbian advocacy organization, the National Gay Task Force (now known as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force), and founder of the Mariposa Education and Research Foundation, one of the very first such entities established to educate and change attitudes about homosexuality and to reduce the stigmas attached to sexuality generally. From this building he conducted the first research establishing that condoms prevent the spread of AIDS, and successfully advocated for the syndrome to be called “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome” (AIDS), rather than the inaccurate and stigmatizing “Gay Related Immune Deficiency” (GRID). Voeller was also the subject of a landmark case before the United States Supreme Court establishing the rights of lesbians and gay men to visit and have access to their children at a time when they were still considered by many to be mentally ill and a danger to children.

186 Spring Street has had an extraordinary impact upon the lives of lesbians and gay men in New York City and the strength of that impact continues. As openly LGBT elected officials, we stand on the shoulders of these great activists, and would not be where we are today without them. The entire South Village has a unique and continuing legacy as a gathering spot for LGBT individuals and an incubator of LGBT activism.

We urge you to take immediate action to protect 186 Spring Street, as well as the rest of the historic South Village.

Sincerely,



Thomas K. Duane
New York State Senate
29th District



Deborah J. Glick
New York State Assemblymember
66th District



Christine C. Quinn
New York City Council
Speaker