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May 17, 2019

Sarah Carroll, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for 6 historic buildings important to the LGBT community

Dear Chair Carroll and the LPC Commissioners:

The Victorian Society of New York strongly endorses the following six historic buildings, each dating to the Victorian era, and each having significance to the history and cultural emergence of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community in America. These sites together help represent and recall individuals, groups and activities that together have helped the LGBT community define itself, organize and pursue its long suppressed civil rights.

LP-2635 The Caffè Cino, at 31 Cornelia Street, was the birthplace of Off Broadway. Located here from 1958 to 1968, Café Cino was a cutting edge center for creative gay artists to express themselves despite the fact that portrayals of homosexuality was at the time still illegal. Playwrights who got their start here include John Guare (“Six Degrees of Separation”) and Lanford Wilson (“Fifth of July”). An Italianate-style tenement and store building, 31 Cornelia Street was constructed in 1877 by Benjamin Warner.

LP-2633 The Women's Liberation Center, which was located at 243 West 20th Street from 1972 to 1987, was an epicenter for the era's emerging feminist and lesbian movements. The center provided social services for women, mounted legal fights against discrimination, and advocacy for women's rights and empowerment. An Anglo-Italianate former firehouse designed in 1866 by Charles E. Hartshorn that housed the Women's Liberation Center from 1972-1987. Still owned by the city, 243 West 20th currently home to a group that trains women for construction and maintenance work.

LP-2632 Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse at 99 Wooster Street was home to the Gay Activist Alliance, whose mission was “to secure basic human rights, dignity, and freedom for all gay people.” Founded in 1969, its headquarters here provided a nurturing home for meetings, cultural events, the newspaper Gay Activist, and a broadcast center for weekly cable TV shows. This beautiful Neo-Grec former firehouse was built in the 1850s, with a major redesign by Napoleon Le Brun in 1881-82

LP-2634 The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center at 208 West 13th Street has for 35 years been a welcoming center for activism, consciousness-raising, and health efforts on behalf of the LGBT community. Hundreds of organizations have made a home or held meetings and events here, including the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which played a key role in passage of NYC's law banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. During the AIDs crisis, the Center opened the nation's first community-based HIV clinic. The Center also contributed 1200 panels to the famous AIDS memorial quilt. An Italianate-style public school building designed by Ammon Macvey, it was built circa 1869.

LP-2636 James Baldwin Residence at 137 West 71st Street Manhattan, was home one of the most important and impactful African American writers of the 20th century. Both in his fiction work, his essays and as a speaker-activist in the Civil Rights Era, Baldwin was a provocative, inspiring voice of his age. His works, many of which were written here, include *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Notes of a Native Son*, and *Giovanni's Room*, the latter of which was ground breaking in its depiction of gays and bisexuals. A former row house built in 1890, it was modernized in 1961 as the apartment house of James Baldwin from 1965 to 1987.

LP-2642 The Audre Lorde Residence is at 207 St. Paul's Avenue Staten Island. An award-winning African American and lesbian poet and essayist, Lorde lived and wrote some of her best work here from 1972 to 1987. She was a prominent voice in the Civil Rights, Women's Rights, and the gay & lesbian movements. A Neo-Colonial-style house designed by Otto Loeffler and built in 1898, which was home to former New York State Poet Laureate, Audre Lorde from 1972 to 1987.

We urge the LPC to designate these six buildings, each of which help narrate the emergence of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community. They also share a common humanitarian thread that reflects this diverse and tolerant multi-cultural city at its finest. Long forced into the shadows, and repressed by both legal and social bigotry, the LGBT's narrative deserves to be told, and we hope that the LPC will help tell that story by designating these 6 buildings as NYC landmarks.

Respectfully,

George Calderaro

George Calderaro, Co-chair
Preservation Committee



David Mulkins, Co-chair
Preservation Committee