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L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center CEO Mourns Loss of Pioneering LGBT Activist Frank Kameney

LOS ANGELES, Oct. 11, 2011—Today, Frank Kameney, a pioneering activist in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, died in his sleep, apparently of natural causes, at age 86. L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center CEO Lorri L. Jean issued the following statement:

“Today our movement lost one of its most brave, impassioned and heroic leaders: Frank Kameney. In 1957, Frank was fired from his position as an astronomer with the Army Map Service in Washington, D.C., because he was gay. But he didn’t accept this deplorable act of discrimination quietly. With virtually no role models to follow, he fought them every step of the way, filing the first civil rights claim in a U.S. court based on sexual orientation and going all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1961, where he argued the case himself.

Thus began Frank’s more than 50 years as an effective advocate on behalf of gay and lesbian civil rights. For example, in 1961, Frank was one of the founders of the Washington, D.C., Mattachine Society. In 1965 he launched the first public protests by gays and lesbians in front of the White House (his picket signs from that demonstration are now in the Smithsonian). In 1971 he was the nation’s first openly gay candidate for the U.S. Congress. He coined the phrase, ‘Gay is good.’

Frank’s accomplishments through the decades are legion. But two of his greatest contributions are among the least recognized. He helped countless federal employees (including members of the armed services) avoid or fight anti-gay discrimination and he helped to identify and develop a significant number of younger gay and lesbian leaders.

Frank did both of these things for me. When I was being considered for higher-than-top-secret security clearances as an attorney for the federal government, Frank helped me develop my strategy for coming out to the investigators. Buoyed by his counsel, I persevered through discriminatory harassment to become the first openly gay or lesbian person to get a top secret security clearance from the CIA. Then, when I was elected president of the Gay Activists Alliance in Washington, D.C., Frank regularly provided advice and counsel to me.

Although his style was often gruff, he was thoroughly enjoyable. I never doubted his dedication to our movement or to my success as a leader. Frank was still going strong and it was a shock to all of us when he was discovered to have died in his sleep earlier today.

Somehow it feels appropriate that Frank would die on National Coming Out Day, given that he

was proudly and loudly out of the closet for every day of his life since his 1957 dismissal.

They broke the mold when they made Frank Kameny. I join all of his friends and loved ones in mourning his passage.”

About the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center

Since 1971 the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center has been building the health, advocating for the rights and enriching the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Our wide array of services and programs includes: free HIV/AIDS care and medications for those most in need; housing, food, clothing and support for homeless LGBT youth; low-cost counseling and addiction-recovery services; essential services for LGBT-parented families and seniors; legal services; health education and HIV prevention programs; transgender services; cultural arts and much more. Visit us on the Web at: www.lagaycenter.org.