Press Release

Tuesday, October 11, 2005

From: Penn State Rainbow Roundtable; Penn State Pride Alliance
Subject: Letter from the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) to Penn State President Graham Spanier regarding alleged discrimination by Rene Portland in Women's Basketball Program at Penn State
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On Tuesday, October 11, 2005 the National Center for Lesbian Rights sent a letter to Penn State President Graham Spanier on behalf of Jennifer Harris, a former Penn State basketball student athlete. In the press release, distributed by NCLR, the organization calls attention to decades-long practices of harassment, intimidation, and silencing of athletes in the women's basketball program who are perceived to be lesbian as well as those who are supportive of lesbian athletes. Because of the bravery of one student athlete, the public is now aware of an issue that PSU's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Allied (LGBTQA) community has known about for decades. Ms. Harris has taken a bold and courageous step by coming forward to tell her story.

The climate in Penn State Intercollegiate Athletics is representative of systemic homophobia and heterosexism experienced by university community members on a daily basis. The instances described by Ms. Harris are not isolated within this institution, despite a 14-year-old university policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, as well as university-wide initiatives to include people who are LGBTQA.

Whereas in the past LGBTQA community members felt unable to act, Ms. Harris' brave stand provides the Penn State community a platform from which silence can be broken. Students, staff, faculty, administrators and alumni who were previously silenced can now step forward on the same platform to corroborate Ms. Harris' claims by sharing their own stories and raising awareness of similar experiences.

As leaders within the LGBTQA community at Penn State, we call upon the university community to hold Coach Portland accountable to the university's own non-discrimination policy, mission statement, and *Framework to Foster Diversity: 2004-2009*. In light of NCLR's request for action, we call upon university administrators to consult with leadership from the LGBTQA community while crafting their response.

We are aware that many within our community will undoubtedly struggle as the situation unfolds. Therefore, we offer a declaration of support and a reminder of the resources available to assist them during this difficult and emotional time. These resources can be accessed via the LGBTA Student Resource Center website (http://www.sa.psu.edu/lgbt/).

This press release represents the first of many steps in advocating for the inclusive, affirming, and safe climate as promised in the *Framework to Foster Diversity: 2004-2009*, the importance of which was reinforced by themes unearthed during the "Creating a Community of Difference" student forum on September 28 and at the Campus Climate Summit on October 5. During the coming months we will continue to educate, organize, strategize, and act as needed.

We take this action to build solidarity among people from underrepresented groups and allies who are part of our community. In order to move forward, we request that organizations and programs affirm our actions by signing copies of this press release and forwarding copies to the Rainbow Roundtable at: (rainbow.roundtable@psu.edu).

Signed,

The Rainbow Roundtable
- The Coalition of LGBTA Graduate Students, University Park
- Allies, University Park
- Undertones, University Park

The Penn State Pride Alliance
- Gay Straight Alliance, Altoona

The Commission on LGBT Equity