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GLMA - Gay and Lesbian Medical Association

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



Open Letter to Sumner Redstone from the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association  
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Contact: Ron Tierney, Communications Director  
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June 14, 2000

Sumner Redstone  
Chief Executive Officer  
Viacom  
1515 Broadway  
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Redstone:

This is a letter about Dr. Laura Schlessinger and the intended launch of her syndicated program by one of Viacom's major subsidiaries, Paramount.

Before we get into "censorship" issues, we want to assure you that our organization — 2000 mostly gay and lesbian physicians and medical students — has never asked that anyone be removed from the air. Not Rush Limbaugh, or even Pat Robertson, no matter how much harm their speech has caused members of the gay and lesbian community. The reason we haven't is that the context of their speech is understood. All of us understand that it is political and religious speech.

Laura Schlessinger is a different matter. By using the "doctor" in front of her name her views are perceived to have clinical value. They do not. Though she is entitled to use the title because she has a doctorate in physiology, there is serious misrepresentation when the public is encouraged to believe — if by no other means than lack of clarification — that she has "clinical" credentials.

For a moment, imagine a young teen sitting in the family room, watching Dr. Laura discuss gays and lesbians as "biological errors," or "deviants" or as she recently suggested "mistakes." The youth now has it from "medical" authority that gays or lesbians (or those perceived to be) are inferior. Actions that stem from those beliefs, either self- or other-directed can be brutal — emotionally and physically.

We're all aware of the Matthew Shepard case in Wyoming and the killing of Brandon Teena in Nebraska. Gary Matson and Winfield Scott Mowder were murdered by white supremacists in California because they were gay. Not too long ago, Billy Jack Gaither, a man from Alabama, was beaten to death because he had "flirted" with his killer. His body was placed on a bonfire fueled by old tires. Last year, a soldier was beaten to death with a baseball bat in a military barracks at Ft. Campbell in Kentucky. More recently, an African American youth was found in New York's Central Park. Gay and racial epithets had been carved in his skull. The stories continue.

These are extreme, but certainly not isolated instances. Every day, young people are harassed in their schools, neighborhoods and homes because they are — or in some cases merely perceived to be — gay or lesbian. Because of the bullying and torment, their lives are often filled with terror. Some drop out of school because they cannot stand the emotional pressure or physical abuse. All too often children are disowned — thrown out of their own homes because the parents feel shame and anger fed by the same kind of ignorance that is espoused by the Dr. Lauras of the world. With no place to go, these children hit the streets, most likely to be victimized all over again.

Mr. Redstone, as the national murder rate has decreased, murders of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have increased — by 150 percent in the last two years. Hateful and inaccurate remarks by people believed to be experts act as justification for those who already have a propensity toward violence against minorities. Gay and lesbian youth are three times more likely to commit suicide than their peers. It should be clear comments that label members of this vulnerable population as "deviants" or "mistakes" contribute to low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, and self hate.

I'm enclosing "Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation & Youth," published not by Gay and Lesbian activists, but by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Federation of Teachers, the American Psychological Association, the Interfaith Alliance, the National Education Association and other mainstream organizations. It is a remarkable document that asks leaders in education to adopt harm reduction programs that will take the violence and bigotry out of our schools.

We know that Viacom is a responsible corporation. We understand, for example, your company provides extensive diversity training for its employees. And in those programs, great care is given so that human differences are respected. These programs encourage sensitivity in the areas of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, disability, and sexual orientation.

We also know that part of your responsibility — as well as ours — is to guarantee other rights as well — freedom of speech, for example. However, freedom of speech does not mean everyone is entitled to his or her own show. We're sure you would not produce a similar program starring someone who

made regular, derogatory, and misinformed public comments about other minorities. Unfortunately, there will always be a market for intolerance and misinformation, but we hope that Viacom will not help perpetuate it.

Mr. Redstone, what we're asking is that you and Viacom help us and many other concerned organizations as we work to dampen the fires of hatred and bias from American society — rather than fuel them. At the very least, we need to make sure that Laura Schlessinger isn't allowed to speak as a member of the medical profession, suggesting knowledge and credentials she doesn't possess.

Finally, we are making this letter public so that others will know that you are at least aware of some of the issues involved in our request that Viacom, CBS, Paramount, and advertisers withdraw support from this program.

Sincerely,



Donald I. Abrams, MD  
President

Maureen S. O'Leary  
Executive Director

cc: Paramount  
CBS

and Board Members:

Ivan Seidenberg, Chairman, CEO, Bell Atlantic Corporation

Ken Miller, Vice Chairman, CS First Boston Corporation

William Schwartz, Professor of Law, Cardozo School of Law