



“No Keys Required: Boston Mayor Tom Menino’s LGBT Legacy”

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During his 20 years as Mayor, Tom Menino has never presented anyone a “Key to the City.” Why not? He doesn’t believe in them. He once explained to me that ceremonial “Keys to the City” portray Boston surrounded by walls, with access granted only to a select few. That’s not Mayor Menino’s vision of our city. His Boston is open to all. No keys required.

It’s that hallmark of his tenure that makes me most proud to have worked for the Mayor and to live in the city he has governed for two decades. Even more than the “Urban Mechanic” moniker, Tom Menino’s greatest legacy will be his commitment to the issues that matter most: social justice and government in the service of people. His passion for creating opportunities and removing barriers to success has driven his urban agenda, and the results are evident from Hyde Park to East Boston – in education, jobs, affordable housing, public safety, public health, the environment, and certainly, civil rights for LGBT people.

I was fortunate to spend the first 15 years of my career working for the Menino Administration, first as the Mayor’s speechwriter, and later, in management roles at the Boston Public Schools. After about a year at City Hall, I came out to everyone in my life. I was worried about the reaction of some friends and family, but I was not worried about my boss, because I had seen first-hand that the Mayor was a straight ally like no other. He had a strong track record on LGBT issues. Some of his closest friends and advisors were gay (and by example, helped me find the courage to come out). Gays and lesbians served openly in City government, including prominent leadership positions. So I had no fear that the Mayor would think of less of me as a gay man. In fact, I always felt that my coming out had only strengthened his respect for me.

Boston’s reputation as a safe, welcoming place for LGBT people to live, work, and raise a family is due in no small part to Tom Menino’s unwavering leadership and support. During the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, then City Councilor Menino emerged as an outspoken advocate for prevention, care, and compassion, long before it was politically fashionable to do so. In 1996, he hosted BAGLY’s annual prom for LGBT youth at City Hall, where it’s been held ever since. A vocal supporter of marriage equality, he stood on City Hall Plaza to welcome the first same-sex couples to be married in Boston. When the anti-gay Chick-fil-A was considering a Boston store, Mayor Menino told them to peddle their poultry and their bigotry elsewhere.

And from the very beginning, he has been unequivocal in his refusal to march in the South Boston St. Patrick’s Day Parade until its organizers stop discriminating against LGBT participants. That was then, and remains today, a brave stance for any Mayor, let alone the first Italian-American Mayor in a politically powerful Irish neighborhood.

Tom Menino may have summed up his philosophy best during his stirring remarks at the Democratic National Convention last summer: “[I]n Boston, we know this country didn’t become great by excluding folks and leaving each other on their own. In Boston, you know what we call immigrants? Mom and Dad. You know what we call same-sex couples? Our friends. Our brothers and sisters. And in Boston, we know government isn’t the answer or the enemy. It’s a partner.”

Thank you, Mayor, for always having our backs. We couldn’t have asked for a better partner.