

Anthony Silvestre



Anthony Silvestre was born in 1946 in New York City. After high school, he entered a Catholic religious organization known as the Holy Cross Brothers. He left after three years due to his disillusionment with the church. Tony finished his final year of college at King's College in Pennsylvania and then attended Penn State as a graduate student.

During the years at Penn State, Tony became active in an organization called the Homophiles of Penn State, and, as president, interacted with many of Pennsylvania's leading gay rights activists.

In 1975, Tony participated in an ad-hoc Gay Rights Task Force convened by Pennsylvania Gov. Milton Shapp. The group met monthly with the heads of state agencies to address issues of concern to the gay and lesbian community. Being involved in Pennsylvania gay politics, Arthur Warner was enamored with the power of the task force. He invited Tony to join the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties.

Committee co-chair Thomas F. Coleman went to Pennsylvania in 1975 to see the council in action with his own eyes. Upon returning to California, Tom distributed an [essay](#) to the gay press titled "After Sodomy Reform: What Next?" He urged gay rights advocates to shift their focus to the executive branch of government, with the first order of business being an executive order by the governor.

In 1976, Shapp issued an executive order formalizing the body. It was titled the Pennsylvania Council on Sexual Minorities. In the executive order, Shapp declared that all executive branch offices and services were to end discriminatory practices and policies against all LGBTQ+ employees, clients, and program of state services. The council was a way to guarantee that the order was implemented.

This experience with gay politics in Pennsylvania prompted Tom to write an [article](#) in the Sexual Law Reporter – a legal periodical that he edited and published – titled "The Executive Branch of Government: An Untapped Source of Power for Gay Right." Tom then convinced Shapp to write a [letter](#) to California Governor Jerry Brown urging him to issue a similar executive order. With this [background](#) in mind, Brown issued an order in 1979 prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination in state government. Tony provided ongoing advice to Tom and others in California on ways to ensure the effective implementation of the order.

Silvestre worked with the department of Children and Youth Services to ensure that non-straight populations were not short-changed in the bureaucracy. He became executive administrator of the Eromin Center. Eromin [Ero: erotic, and min: minorities] is a center established to provide culturally competent mental health services.

Tony died in 2022 at the age of 76. The following are excerpts from an obituary published in the

Philadelphia Gay [News](#):

Dr. Anthony Silvestre, who chaired the trailblazing Pennsylvania Council for Sexual Minorities in the 1970s, passed away September 1 at his home in Vermont. He was 76 years old.

In Philadelphia, Silvestre was an organizer for the Human Rights Campaign Fund local office, gave lectures at the Gay Community Center (including one titled “From Church Basement to the Capitol”), and served as executive director of the Eromin Center, which was established in 1973 to provide safe mental health care to sexual minorities. At the time, much mental health care for LGBTQ people centered around bogus “cure-based” approaches, including conversion therapy. After five years with the organization, Silvestre was removed from his position, an action which many in the community found to be unwarranted.

In March 1984, Silvestre was hired by the University of Pittsburgh to research the HIV/AIDS epidemic as part of the Pitt Men’s Study. Silvestre helped find and recruit thousands of gay men to participate in the study, which was run by Dr. Charles Rinaldo. At the time, it was one of only five studies funded by the federal government to try and uncover risk factors for AIDS. Silvestre and his colleagues created a community advisory board, which helped fine tune the marketing to recruit those most affected by and most at risk for HIV/AIDS.

“It was probably one of the first in the country dealing with HIV,” Silvestre told the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project. “And that community advisory board had some of the most popular gay bar owners and gay bartenders — it had the head of MCC, Metropolitan Community Church, it had other well-known celebrities in the gay community. And so these people helped us fashion the marketing, they helped us get into the bars, they gave us an opportunity to do a training session for all bartenders about AIDS so that those bartenders could themselves act as educators in the bars. We were able to develop even cocktail napkins that had information about AIDS that the 17 bartenders would give out.”

During an interview with the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project, Tony spoke about the realities of LGBTQ activism in the early days.

“I know activists in Pennsylvania who have had, have been shot at, have been threatened, who’ve been attacked one way or another, who’ve been pressured by their employers and so on. But even in the face of that [they] kept being active with not much reward. Even from within the community I remember vividly early on in the days of being told more than once to stop rocking the boat, gay people were afraid that if we rocked the boat too much they would become visible and therefore begin suffering consequences of stigma. And so being a gay activist didn’t mean that you made friends with a lot of gay people, sometimes people avoided you.”