



The Policy Institute National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

June 2, 1999

Thomas F. Coleman, Executive Director
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Dear Tom:

Thank you for all of your assistance in helping me to create *The Domestic Partnership Organizing Manual* for the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Your vast expertise in the area of domestic partnership policy was tremendously useful in crafting this key resource for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) and ally community.

I am particularly appreciative of the perspective you lent with regard to domestic partnership benefits and their importance to unmarried, heterosexual couples. Your advocacy on behalf of these constituents was one of the driving forces behind the manual's strong stance favoring domestic partnership benefits for all, rather than solely GLBT couples. In my consultations with companies and individuals working toward domestic partnership benefits, many have been persuaded to include opposite-sex, unmarried couples in their policies as well. The work that you do and the arguments you further continue lay the groundwork for these accomplishments.

Once again, thank you for contributing all of your knowledge and support. I look forward to collaborating with you again on future projects.

Sincerely,

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The

Domestic Partnership Organizing Manual

for employee benefits

by Sally Kohn



THE POLICY INSTITUTE
OF THE
NATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN TASK FORCE

1995 which provides for continuation of benefits). However, many employers choose to formulate COBRA-like policies to cover domestic partners and their dependent children upon termination of employment or the DP itself.

It is most desirable to offer the full-range of benefits to domestic partners that are offered to employee spouses. Yet many employers offer only a few soft benefits to domestic partners, generally for cost-related reasons (for more on this, see the “Arguing the Case” section of this manual on page 9). Acquiring soft benefits is an important step toward full and equal treatment, but companies should carefully consider the repercussions and implications of ruling out the extension of comprehensive benefits. Wherever possible, employers should extend the same benefits to domestic partners as they extend to spouses. This is the most fair and equitable thing to do.

Suggested Policy

The best policy is the broadest and most equitable policy. That is, the ideal DP policy covers the widest range of family types while keeping definitions and registration requirements comparable to those imposed on married couples. If the employer wishes to request a signed affidavit from unmarried couples, then a marriage license or similar affidavit should be requested from married couples. If a spouse’s children are provided health insurance even if they are not legally related to the employee, then the domestic partners’ children should also be covered. And, to the fullest extent possible, whatever benefits are offered to spouses should be available to domestic partners. If the goal of DP benefits is truly equity, then the best policy is one which is as equitable as possible in all its dimensions.

Moreover, an ideal DP policy covers a wide range of family types. If possible, an employer should offer benefits to same- and opposite-sex couples, both romantic and non-romantic, as well as partners’ children. By crafting an inclusive policy such as this, the employer allows the employee to define his or her own family and responds to that family’s needs. Moreover, an inclusive policy is more flexible and can adapt to employee family structures as they continue to change.