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## Spouse Benefits Extended to 'Domestic Partners'

By G.M. BUSH

Despite warnings of grave social costs, the Los Angeles City Council voted Wednesday to include "domestic partners" in the "immediate family" category under which city employees are granted bereavement and sick leave.

Under the plan, a domestic partner could be a close friend, a common-law spouse or a homosexual lover. To qualify, a confidential affidavit would be filed with the city declaring the person's identity.

Councilman Ernani Bernardi strongly objected to the measure, which he characterized as a "gay ordinance."

After a discussion of potential cost of the proposal, he said money is not the issue, but rather that "it goes beyond what is considered to be the normal relationship between a male and a female."

"This is a major change," he said. "It's the social costs; that's my problem."

The council, however, voted 11-2 in favor of the proposal. The concept will be presented to employee unions in contract talks.

The length of a potential leave would depend on the employee's particular job and Memorandum of Understanding contract. City law allows up to five days off for an illness of a family member and three days bereavement leave.

Last year, an Employee Benefits Survey conducted by the city found that approximately 4.2 percent, or 840, of the city's 20,000 civilian em-

ployees live with a domestic partner.

The proposal adopted by the council was supported by the two-person majority of the council's Governmental Operations Committee: Councilman Michael Woo, the committee chairman, and Councilwoman Gloria Molina.

Their majority report to the full council said current employee benefit plans were "designed in the 1960s for the typical family of a working husband, non-working wife, and two or more dependent children."

Now, however, fewer than 10 percent of the workforce fits this model. "The majority of workers today are single, two-income couples, singles with dependents, and older employees. 'One size fits all' when applied to benefit plans, no longer best fits the needs of today's employees," the report stated.

### Feasibility Study

The report was based in part on a feasibility study conducted by the Personnel Department that included a review of domestic partnership ordinances already adopted by the cities of Berkeley and West Hollywood and the Berkeley Unified School District. Proposals now under review in San Francisco and Madison, Wisc., also were studied.

The committee's third member, Councilwoman Joan Milke Flores, opposed the plan, noting that the city administrative officer had reported that the inclusion of domestic partners in employee benefits would be seen as a move toward incorporating them in health, dental, insurance and retirement benefits.

She also cited the high cost of the program, again relying on data from the CAO, which concluded that extending bereavement and sick leave benefits to domestic partners would cost about \$2.3 million annually.

Councilman Joel Wachs challenged this figure, saying employees would not receive any additional time off.

Granting health benefits to domestic partners would cost the city anywhere from \$3.9 million to \$5.2 million a year, Flores said.

When the matter came before the committee for consideration, those who testified said they planned to seek extension of other benefits to domestic partners in the future, she said.

Instead of expanding sick and bereavement leave, the council should consider a "generic time-off" plan "to be used by any employee for any purpose without justification," she said, calling this approach "less complicated and more equitable."

Woo called this proposal "potentially much more expensive to the city."

Flores strongly objected to the confidential affidavits that would be needed to validate domestic partner relationships. "Although the City Attorney has reported that the City will probably not incur any liability through this process, it is clearly not within the purview of local governments to validate personal relationships," she said in her minority report.

The proposal was one of 110 recommendations of the Task Force on Family Diversity in a report issued in May, "Strengthening Families: A Model for Community Action."

The 37-member blue-ribbon task force was convened by Woo and included representatives of Los Angeles' legal, religious, educational and business communities. Parents, students and governmental employees also were included.

The report was written by attorney Thomas F. Coleman, the panel's principal consultant.