

## Who is *your* family? Your roommate? Your live-in lover? Your husband and kids?

**F**amilies come in many forms these days—and at long last, lawmakers are beginning to take note.

Last June, San Francisco made headlines and history when it passed a law allowing unmarried couples to register their relationships with City Hall in much the same way they'd apply for marriage licenses. Under the ordinance, "domestic partners" are protected against discrimination by the city and specifically granted the same hospital-visitation rights spouses enjoy. For city workers, there's more: Unmarried employees will soon be able to put their partners on their health insurance plans as spouses can.

Similar movements are afoot in other communities: In 1985, the city of Berkeley extended health benefits to live-in partners; Santa Cruz soon followed suit. Both cities also grant unmarried employees bereavement leave and time off to care for sick partners. Los Angeles has broadened its leave policies, too, and is considering extending health coverage. In New York, judges are wrestling with the question of what "family" is: The state's highest court recently held that a gay couple who'd lived together for eleven years could be considered a family under New York City's rent-

control laws; other cases are pending.

Coming to grips with the fact that "family" doesn't always mean what it used to isn't easy for lawmakers—or the rest of us. But nice, neat definitions won't do anymore. Only 27 percent of the households in this country are "traditional" families (mom, pop and kids); over 2.6 million are cohabiting couples. Many new-style families are even further from the norm—single moms doubled up à la *Kate & Allie*, handicapped or elderly people sharing group homes.

"On the spectrum of relationships from total strangers to married couples, there are many variations," says Thomas F. Coleman, member of the California Legislature's Joint Select Task Force on the Changing Family. "If people are living together in a long-term relationship, it's unfair to treat them as strangers." Nor is it fair for all the perks—the tax breaks, insurance deals, health club discounts—to go only to married people.

We believe in a definition of "family" broad enough to take in all the many ways we share our lives with one another—and applaud those communities broad-minded enough to build that definition into law.