

MOUNT WASHINGTON

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Single people faced with discrimination, says panel

Noting that 55 percent of the adults in Los Angeles are unmarried, City Attorney Jim Hahn released a report today which calls for sweeping reforms by government and the public sector to combat what he called "widespread and pervasive discrimination" against single people.

Hahn released a report prepared by his consumer task force on marital status discrimination, chaired by USC Law Center Professor Thomas F. Coleman.

The task force, which held three public hearings during its five months of research, determined that marital status discrimination is common in a number of industries, including insurance, airlines, health

clubs, lending institutions, automobile and travel clubs, newspapers and housing.

The group said that efforts to end such discrimination are possible only with "the voluntary cooperation of the business community," and said some companies have halted such practices and others are considering changes in corporate policies.

The report included a number of recommendations for action at various levels, including the following:

—The state insurance commissioner to defend in court the new regulations prohibiting marital status discrimination in auto insurance underwriting.

—The insurance commissioner to declare marital status discrimination as an unfair practice in all lines of insurance, and to instruct life insurance companies to stop interfering with an applicant's right to name any beneficiary of his or her choice.

—The state Attorney General's office to render an opinion as to whether credit institutions violate existing laws when they offer benefits to credit card holders and their spouses, but not to credit card holders and their unmarried partners.

—Credit unions to eliminate marital status discrimination by allowing unmarried partners to become members.

—The Los Angeles Department of

Airports to survey airlines using Los Angeles International Airport, to determine if any have promotions or discounts which are granted to spouses but not unmarried partners or household members.

—The Los Angeles City Council to add "marital status" to the city ordinance prohibiting discrimination at certain types of private clubs, and to the ordinance prohibiting discrimination by city contractors.

—The state Legislature to add "marital status" to Business and Professions Code Section 22438, which disallows business deductions for expenditures at clubs that engage in illegal discrimination.

—The Hospital Association of Southern California to encourage member facilities to end any marital status discrimination that may exist in parent visitation rules.

Hahn said, "No one wants to diminish benefits and advantages for married persons, but what we do want is for unmarried persons to enjoy the same benefits and advantages. As we are seeing today around the world, civil rights are not diminished when they are shared."