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LAW

JOBLESS benefits sometimes can go to unmarried partner, court says.

Massachusetts' highest court granted unemployment benefits to a woman who followed a man, with whom she had lived for 13 years but had not married, when he relocated his business. Many states, including Massachusetts, allow jobless benefits for spouses in such situations.

In the 4-3 ruling, the state Supreme Judicial Court decided the woman's move was involuntary and was covered by the benefits law. In one of three dissents, Justice Joseph Nolan called the decision "an obituary for the concept of the traditional family."

The Massachusetts court is the highest court in any state to make such a decision, said Paula Ettelbrick, legal director of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Most states allow people who leave their job for "good cause" or because of "family necessity" to claim benefits, but those phrases are differently defined from state to state, said Thomas F. Coleman, a Los Angeles attorney with EEO Seminars, a company that advises managers on avoiding employment discrimination.

(Reep vs. Commissioner of the Dept. of Employment Training, Supreme Judicial Court, Mass., No. 5798)

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