

Chicago Sun-Times

online News

Tired of the Singles Scene?

County panel OKs benefits for gay partners

March 19, 1999

BY TIM NOVAK COOK COUNTY REPORTER

A Cook County Board committee approved a plan Thursday to give health benefits to the gay partners of county workers, with the possibility that the plan could someday include unmarried heterosexual couples.

The future of the same-sex domestic partners ordinance will be decided by the full County Board, which is expected to adopt a plan as soon as April 6.

The county's plan to offer benefits only to gay workers would discriminate against unmarried heterosexuals who are live-in partners, said Commissioner William Moran, who voted against the plan as it passed by a 3-2 vote in the Human Relations Committee.

"These benefits should be available to all," Moran said.

Commissioner Calvin Sutker, a Skokie Democrat who voted for the same-sex partners plan, said it was a "first step" in providing health benefits for all domestic partners.

The same-sex ordinance sponsored by Commissioner Michael Quigley, who represents Chicago's gay community, is patterned after the city's 1997 measure. Unlike Chicago, most governments that offer health benefits to domestic partners include heterosexual couples, said Thomas Coleman, executive director of the American Association for Single People, a Los Angeles-based group.

By excluding heterosexual couples, Coleman said Cook County could face a lawsuit like the one Byron Cleaves filed against the city of Chicago when they denied him bereavement leave when his fiance's father was dying.

Tim Novak