

# Open Forum

American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California

Winter 2001 Vol. 75 No. 1

## Equal Rights for Singles: ACLU Signs on to "Stop the Stigma" Campaign

BY TOM COLEMAN

The Board of Directors of the ACLU of Southern California recently endorsed several campaigns of the American Association for Single People (AASP). AASP is a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization promoting the well being and human rights of unmarried adults, couples, parents and families. The Glendale-based group believes that equal rights for workers, consumers and taxpayers should not depend on marital status.

AASP was formed to give a voice to the 80 million adults in the nation who are unmarried, including some 11 million in California. Despite these large numbers, marital status discrimination occurs in the workplace, marketplace, and in government programs.

Married employees receive health insurance benefits for their spouses, but unmarried employees usually are not given such benefits for their domestic partners. Unmarried consumers may be required to pay higher insurance rates and unmarried taxpayers sometimes are forced to pay higher taxes than married people. Society also continues to stigmatize individuals who do not marry and couples who form domestic partnerships. Children of unmarried parents are sometimes degraded by our statutes or our judges.

AASP's "Stop the Stigma Campaign" is one of the programs endorsed by the ACLU board. The purpose of this campaign is to call to the attention of judges the harmful effects of stigmatizing language sometimes used in their written opinions and orally from the bench when they refer to children born to unmarried parents. AASP research has revealed that each year, about 33 percent of births in the United States involve children born to unmarried parents. Yet a majority of states continue to stigmatize such children. In 17 states there are statutes on the books that refer to children born to unmarried

parents as "bastards" or "illegitimate." Some appellate judges in 37 states continue to refer to these children as "illegitimate" rather than as "children born to unmarried parents." ACLU of Southern California President Stephen Rohde has written letters to the American Judges Association and the National Association of Women Judges to encourage them to adopt a resolution to stop the stigma.

The board also endorsed AASP's "Singles-Friendly Workplace Campaign" which seeks to ensure that unmarried employees are treated fairly and that domestic partner benefits are offered by employers for all unmarried couples, whether gay or straight. Both campaigns are part of AASP's "Human Rights Agenda for Unmarried America," which the board also endorsed.

Many local elected officials and political activists are members of AASP, including Los Angeles City Councilman Joel Wachs, City Attorney James Hahn, mayoral advisor Steven Soboroff, State Senator Sheila Kuehl, and civil rights attorney Gloria Allred. ACLU of Southern California's executive director, Ramona Ripston, also belongs to AASP.

AASP was founded by Lloyd E. Rigler, a longtime benefactor of the ACLU and other progressive organizations. "I created AASP to do for single adults of all ages what AARP has done for seniors—put an unrecognized class on the map and give them a collective voice. If enough people join AASP, politicians and corporate executives will begin to listen and changes will be made."

Membership in AASP is open to any adult who makes a tax-deductible donation of \$10 or more. To join AASP, or for more information about its projects, write to AASP, 415 East Harvard Street, Suite 204, Los Angeles, California 91205, or call 818.242.5100, or visit its website at [www.unmarriedAmerica.com](http://www.unmarriedAmerica.com).