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Singles of the world, unite!

The AASP aspires to be the AARP for the unmarried.

LET'S FACE IT: Despite its often coveted freedoms (not answering to someone else comes to mind), singledom has its downside, too. In addition to the stigma being alone carries in many social situations and the pressure within our society to marry, single people don't enjoy the financial and legal benefits of married couples.

Take heart, solitary souls: The 5-year-old American Association for Single People (unmarriedamerica.org) is trying to do for the unmarried what the powerhouse AARP has done for seniors: give them a greater voice in making public policy. The group isn't anti-marriage; members simply stress that they shouldn't be penalized for being single.

"Discrimination and unfair treatment of single people permeate society," says co-founder Tom Coleman, a lawyer in Glendale, Calif. Strengthening workplace pension and health benefits for singles to match those of married people has become a primary focus of the group's 3,500 members.

Although their ranks are no match for the clout carried by the AARP's 35 million members, census stats hint at singles' hidden potential: 86 million Americans, nearly 40% of adults, are single, and in 300 cities a majority of households are headed by an unmarried adult. "Singles are perceived as losers, someone who is lonely and defective. We're out to change that," Coleman says.

