



American Association for Single People

Protecting the rights of single people, unmarried couples, and nonmarital families

For Immediate Release
February 4, 1999

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Comprehensive and Gender-Neutral Domestic Partnership Act is Introduced in Hawaii

House Majority Leader Ed Case introduced a comprehensive domestic partnership bill in the Hawaii Legislature last week. It is the only bill pending in Hawaii on this subject.

The bill is patterned after a model domestic partnership act submitted by attorney Thomas F. Coleman to the Hawaii Commission on Sexual Orientation and the Law in 1995 and to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1996. It would apply to domestic partners all of the benefits, protections, and obligations which Hawaii statutes confer on spouses, dependents, family members, and household members. Both same-sex and opposite-sex unmarried couples are covered by the bill.

In 1995, the Chairperson of the Hawaii Commission asked Coleman to draft the framework for a comprehensive domestic partnership act. Coleman is a national authority on marital status discrimination, family diversity, and domestic partnership. The Commission then recommended that the Legislature enact the model bill. In 1996, Coleman was one of three experts invited by the Senate Judiciary Committee to testify at an informational briefing for senators on domestic partnership.

Coleman is now the executive director of the American Association for Single People, a national organization advocating equal rights for all single people, unmarried couples, and unmarried families, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity, or religion.

Coleman was pleased that Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women, urged the Governor and legislative leaders to pass a comprehensive and gender-neutral domestic partnership act. "In its current form, HB884 is truly a model for the nation—a bill that one day could be replicated in all of the states," Coleman said.

If passed by the Hawaii Legislature and signed by the Governor, HB884 would be the first comprehensive domestic partnership act to be enacted by any state in the nation. The official summary of the bill, taken from the legislative web site (www.capitol.hawaii.gov) appears below:

"Description: Establishes domestic partnerships law. Allows 2 persons who live together, consider themselves to be members of each other's immediate family, agree to be jointly responsible for each other's basic living expenses, not married, not related by blood, and at least 18 years of age to file a declaration of domestic partnership with the director of health. Extends same rights and obligations as spouses in a marriage relationship to domestic partners. Prohibits discrimination because of domestic partnership status. Repeals Reciprocal Beneficiaries law."