

Unmarried Relatives Don't Qualify for Some 'Family Friendly' Workplace Policies



The following two letters were received by AASP from workers complaining that their employers are favoring traditional husband-wife-child families over other family living arrangements.

AASP advocates for workplace policies which are fair to all employees regardless of marital status or family configuration. These two letters are a reminder that many employers need to take a close look at their personnel policies.

Employers can create work environments which are friendly and fair to unmarried and married workers, those with and without children, and employees who live with or care for relatives.

Let us know of your experiences at work. Is your employer fair to unmarried workers, or have you had experiences similar to these folks?

QUESTION:

Why No Flexibility for My Need to Care for My Elderly Dad?



I am 53 and single with no children. I am now in the position where I need to be the sole caregiver of my 84 year old father. He does not drive.

For two years after my mother died, I tried to manage taking care of him from my home 15 miles away. That meant cleaning two houses, taking care

of two yards, picking up prescriptions, grocery shopping for him and myself, taking him to all doctor appointments, and anything else he might need. In addition to this, I held down a full time hourly job.

After two exhausting years of this, I finally decided to sell my home and move in with him.

My father had triple bypass and artery surgery simultaneously a couple of years ago. Naturally, his health goes in peaks and valleys.

My employer complained when I needed to take him to more doctor's appointments than I originally scheduled him for. Would this have been a problem if he were my child? Probably not.

I had accumulated many hours of sick time; however, I was not allowed to use it to take him to doctors appointments.

Employees with children were allowed to use their sick time to take them to appointments and to stay with them if they were sick. I was told to use my vacation time or be docked my pay for his appointments. I felt this was discriminatory so when my father had a doctors appointment, I just called in sick and took the whole day off. (The company I work for has over 50 employees.)

Now I see that the Senate Family Services Committee has approved legislation whereby employees could be entitled to use their accumulated sick leave to care for an ill child, parent or spouse. This is how it should be.

This same company whined when I wouldn't bring my father to their "family picnic." They wouldn't recognize my father as being family, yet I live with him and have no other family within 1800 miles to take care of him in my absence. I didn't realize I was an orphan all these years just because I was unmarried and childless.

Who can I contact to help get this bill passed? I would appreciate any help you can give me.

Kate

QUESTION:

Why Can't I Take Mom and Sister to Company Events?



I work for a loan servicing company. For many years this company has allowed married employees to bring their wives and as many children as they have to company events such as the annual company picnic.

But when a single employee, like myself wants to bring his dependents, which in this case are my 60-year-old mother and 18 year-old sister, the company refuses to treat them as my family and refuses to pay for any participation in company functions, including the Christmas party.

Single employees in the company have always feared upper management but I after 5 years of working for this company I have had enough!

What can I do? I am also afraid of getting fired as I do love my work and need my job.

Ray

AASP RESPONSE:

Many employees are afraid to speak up for fear of retaliation. If there is no union, these workers often suffer in silence for years.

In such cases, a letter or telephone call from an outside agency might cause the employer to reevaluate restrictive and unfair policies such as these. The agency could write a generic letter of inquiry, without using the employees name or other identifying information.

The outside agency could be a minister or a seniors group. It might even be a local or state elected official. In appropriate cases, AASP would write a letter for a member who can't solve the problem alone.