

# Singles in America demanding equality

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**S**tephen Moore isn't doing "the married thing." At least not yet.

Moore, 29, doesn't think he should be penalized for not tying the knot. But he and other single adults across New Jersey and the country think that's exactly what is happening.

One thing that bothers Moore is that singles pay higher taxes than people who are married.

"A married couple with two incomes makes more money," said Moore, promotions manager for the Atlantic City Hilton Casino Resort. "They should pay more money than a single person."

Single people like Moore are growing in numbers and as a percentage of households, according to the 2000 census.

In New Jersey, married-couple households declined from 56.5 percent to 53.5 percent in the past decade. Various kinds of singles households — unmarried couples, singles living alone, single parents — increased by 3 percent.

As their numbers increase, more are demanding what they see as fairer treatment in fiscal matters. One national group charges that singles carry the burden of paying more taxes, working longer hours and receiving fewer benefits than their married co-workers.

"There is economic discrimination in the workplace," said Thomas Coleman director of the American Association for Single People. "Some of the plans favor people who are married. (For) people who have different living arrangements, the traditional benefits plan does not fit them anymore."

According to the census, 450,599 New Jersey residents younger than age 65 live alone, compared to 372,435 in 1990. In addition, there are more than 151,000 unmarried couples living together in the state, a 63 percent increase since 1990.

In this region, the city with the most singles living alone is Atlantic City, with 3,467. Other area municipalities with a high number of singles include Vineland, Galloway and Egg Harbor townships and Ocean City.

Coleman said employers should be more aware of this group's needs. His organization would like to see more "cafeteria-like" benefits plans that would allow singles to extend their benefits to family members and even live-in partners.

"What we want is for single people to have options and have equal pay for equal work," Coleman said. "If a company is going to pay for a spouse, the employer should give the same amount of money to the single employee to be used where he or she needs it."

Area human-resources personnel are noticing the trend. "There are a lot more single people," said Linda Guntner, manager of compensation and benefits for Harrah's Atlantic City and Showboat Casino-Hotel.

The only people not covered under the benefits plan for Harrah's and Showboat employees are unmarried partners of single workers, she said.

Coleman claims employers favor one lifestyle over the other. "It is not their role to promote one social role over the other," Coleman said. "They should be concerned with having a healthy workforce and respect diversity."

He said another way singles are treated unfairly is that singles often are the ones asked to work extra hours.

"Who is asked to work overtime or during the holidays?" Coleman said. "The assumption is that single people don't have a family. But everybody has a family, and the assumption is not fair."

Coleman and his organization hope the census numbers serve as a wake-up call to employers and to the government.

"Unmarried America is growing and married America is shrinking," said. "The trend is there. Right now, corporate and government policy are out of alignment with reality. We don't want to take anything away from married people, but we want to level the field to help all people."

*Story written by Maricarmen Rivera and Joanne Marciano, staff writers for the Press of Atlantic City.*

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