



National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund testimony submitted to the United States House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia hearing on “The Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act of 2009”

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**Statement by Rea Carey, Executive Director
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

I thank Chairman Lynch and the subcommittee for holding this hearing on the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act of 2009, and I thank Representative Baldwin for her tireless work in support of the bill. On behalf of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund — the oldest national advocacy organization for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people — I urge the subcommittee to support this important legislation.

The Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act would provide domestic partner benefits for federal employees and their same-sex partners. These benefits include federal health insurance and enhanced dental and vision benefits; retirement and disability benefits; family, medical and emergency leave; group life insurance; long-term care insurance; compensation for work injuries; and benefits for disability, death or captivity. The bill would also ensure that employees’ domestic partners are subject to the same ethics rules that currently apply to federal employees’ opposite-sex spouses, such as regulations designed to prevent nepotism and requirements for financial disclosure.

Spousal or partnership benefits are a substantial portion of any employee’s true compensation. The federal government currently contributes approximately \$3,700 toward the health insurance costs of each unmarried employee, and approximately \$8,300 toward the health insurance cost of each married couple. That \$4,600 difference is openly discriminatory; it is money that is freely available to heterosexual couples, but not same-sex couples, regardless of whether or not those same-sex couples are legally married.

UCLA’s Williams Institute estimates that more than 30,000 federal workers have same-sex domestic partners who are not federal employees. These 30,000 men and women are being unfairly denied a benefit that is readily and easily available to their heterosexual counterparts.

In addition to the issue’s fundamental fairness, our failure to act has also made it significantly more difficult for the government to recruit and retain the best people. Ambassador Michael Guest, who testified here this afternoon, recently left the State Department after being unable to secure health insurance benefits for his partner. Across the country, an unknown number of LGBT employees have done the same, leaving government for jobs in the private sector, where benefit coverage for same-sex partners is much easier to find.

Currently, the majority of Fortune 500 companies — including Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, General Electric, IBM, Microsoft, Dow Chemical, Walt Disney, Citigroup and Time Warner — offer domestic partner benefits to their employees. So do more than 300 colleges and universities, more than 200 local governments and 19 states. This legislation has been endorsed by the American Federation of Government Employees, the National Federation of Federal Employees, the National Treasury Employees Union and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, together representing nearly two and a half million government employees.

A Quinnipiac poll conducted in April 2009 demonstrated that a majority of Americans believe that same-sex couples should receive federal benefits. A *Newsweek* poll conducted in December 2008 found that two-thirds of the country believes that same-sex partners should receive social security, and fully 73 percent of the country believes that same-sex partners should be eligible for health insurance and other benefits. Far from a radical social policy, this legislation would simply bring the federal government up to the standard expected by nearly three-fourths of U.S. taxpayers.

It is unconscionable that the federal government, the country's largest civilian employer, does not already provide domestic partnership benefits. With this bill, the time has come to rectify this injustice. We thank the subcommittee for this hearing, we urge it to report this legislation favorably, and we urge swift passage of the bill in the House of Representatives.