

**NOGLSTP Bulletin - Winter 1996**  
(featured excerpt)

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**Domestic Partner Benefits**  
*...On the Increase*

(REUTERS, Monday, November 20, 1995, NEW YORK)

The number of organizations extending domestic partner benefits to gay and lesbian employees is skyrocketing, new data shows. Since Jan. 1, employers offering these benefits have nearly doubled to 428 from 230, according to Common Ground, a Natick, Mass.-based consulting firm that specializes in workplace education and diversity training. Five years ago only five companies provided domestic partner benefits to gays.

"For every one of those 428 there are at least 20 organizations just in the U.S. that are being petitioned by their employees, mostly by gay employees, to implement those benefits," said Liz Winfeld, co-founder of Common Ground. "It's increasing because domestic partner benefits are simply good business for an organization," she said. "They provide a high return on investment at low cost, and show an organization is truly inclusive for all its constituencies. If they (companies) want to successfully market to the gay community, the gay community is saying to them, 'What are you going to do for us?'," Winfeld said. According to Winfeld, homosexual employees are asking for a company policy that expressly forbids discrimination for sexual orientation and includes employee education as well as domestic partner benefits.

Walt Disney Co.'s extension of medical coverage to partners of gay employees "is a significant breakthrough," Winfeld said. The entertainment giant refused to back down when 15 Florida lawmakers accused it of "belittling the sanctity of marriage." However, 76 percent of employees polled last year by Human Rights Campaign, a Washington-based gay lobby, said they supported "equal employment rights for gay people."

Meanwhile, Winfeld says that the number of Fortune 1000 companies protecting lesbian and gay workers with anti-discrimination policies has soared from about 500 this spring to an estimated 750 now.

According to data compiled in Winfeld's new book, "Straight Talk About Gays in the Workplace" (Amacom Books, New York), the cost of coverage to employers is minimal as "both adult partners usually work and therefore have their own benefits through their own employers." Another factor limiting employer costs is that gay relationships involve fewer children, "and childbirth remains the most costly of all insurance expenses," Winfeld and co-author Susan Spielman write. Medical treatment for AIDS ranks fifth on the list of the most expensive medical conditions, Winfeld said, after premature birth, heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. Covering partners of homosexual employees has added "less than 1 percent to the total medical insurance budget of any of the private sector employers in the U.S.," Winfeld said, citing Common Ground's research.

Many of the estimated 12 million homosexuals in the United States labor force are reluctant to identify themselves by asking for domestic partner benefits, Winfeld said, as "there are a great many places that do

not protect them on the basis of their sexual orientation, so if they choose to take the benefit out of financial need they may feel as though the risk is too great." Many younger gay employees, though, she added, are telling employers bluntly, "I happen to be gay and I will not be treated as a second-class citizen. If you do not treat me equitably, I will not labor for you."

Among employers extending domestic partner benefits to gay workers, according to data provided by Common Ground, are: American Red Cross, Apple Computer, Barnes & Noble, Ben & Jerry's, California Water, Capital Cities/ABC, Coors Brewing, Cray Research, Genentech, Harvard, HBO, Kaiser Permanente, Levi Strauss, Lotus Development, MCA/Universal, Microsoft, and MIT. Also, New York Times employees represented by the Newspaper Guild, NYNEX, New York University, Northern Telecom, Northwestern University, Paramount, Princeton University, Starbucks, Sony, Sun Microsystems, Time Inc., United Way, Universal Studios, and Viacom.

City governments providing domestic partner benefits for gays include Baltimore, Hartford, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, Portland, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, and Seattle.

In Canada, employers providing domestic partner benefits for gays include Bell Canada Enterprises, Bell Sygma, Bank of Montreal, Cami Automotive, Canadian Broadcasting Co., IBM Canada, London Life Assurance, Ontario Hydro, Sears Canada, Shell Oil, Shopper's Drug Mart, Toronto Hydro, Toronto Dominion Bank, and United Church of Canada. Also, the cities of Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver, and governments of British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, North West Territories, and Yukon.

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