

# The Oakland Tribune

## Oakland approves benefits for straight domestic partners

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By Stacey Wells

OAKLAND -- After a yearlong battle, city officials voted Tuesday to grant domestic partner benefits to heterosexual city employees.

The 8-1 vote by the City Council reverses a policy that extended medical benefits only to the registered domestic partners of same-sex city employees. The decision follows complaints filed by two workers and engendered considerable pressure from the state labor commissioner and other politicians.

In a letter to the council, newly elected 9th District Rep. Barbara Lee urged the city to pursue "fair treatment and benefits to all city employees, regardless of martial status."

Since 1996, Oakland has allowed city employees to register their domestic partnerships, regardless of sexual orientation. But Oakland only extended medical benefits to same-sex domestic partners, excluding heterosexual couples.

Two city employees, Mickey Ayyoub and Allan Edwards, filed complaints with the state labor commissioner, who ruled in November that Oakland's "gays only" medical coverage is illegal.

Ayyoub and Edwards also hired noted Los Angeles attorney Thomas Coleman, who has built a career fighting for gay rights by pushing an agenda of universal inclusion.

"This was a great educational opportunity. I think that if the council had heard all of this information back in 1996 it would not have done a gay-only plan," Coleman said. "There was a lot of misinformation."

Councilmember John Russo (Grand Lake-Chinatown) cast the lone dissenting vote on the issue.

"Gays and lesbians can't get married and what the council was trying to do was to remedy that injustice," he said. "I think the council got it right the first time. I think history will bear that out and some day, when we reach sufficient enlightenment to recognize same-sex marriage, then this whole issue of domestic partners will be rendered moot."

Oakland stood virtually alone in insisting that its "gays only" medical coverage was legal. Thirty-two other California cities offering domestic partner medical benefits cover heterosexual and same-sex couples.

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