

# Human Rights Agenda for Unmarried America

The American Association for Single People Would Like Your Endorsement of this Agenda

Promote Self Esteem • Change Public Opinion • Protect Personal Privacy • Eliminate Bias in the Workplace, Marketplace, and Government Programs

**Privacy.** 21 states violate the privacy of consenting adults by making it a crime for two unmarried adults to have intimate relations in private. Cohabitation between a man and woman is illegal in a dozen states. Worse yet, federal tax law says that one partner cannot claim the other as a dependent if the relationship is illegal in the state in which they live. The government must get out of our bedrooms.

**Stigma.** Most states unjustly stigmatize children born to unmarried parents. Statutes in 13 states refer to these children as “bastards” and the judges in 37 states refer to them as “illegitimate” children. No child is illegitimate. Legislators and judges must stop the name calling.

**Job Benefits.** Unmarried workers receive less pay for doing the same work as married employees. This is because most employers give greater benefits compensation (health, pension, etc.) to married workers. This disparity causes single workers or those with a domestic partner to receive 25% less pay than their married coworkers. Employers should provide equal pay for equal work to all employees regardless of marital status. Cafeteria-style benefits programs with equal allocation of benefits to all workers are the best solution. Domestic partner plans should be open to both same-sex couples and unmarried heterosexual couples.

**Housing.** Some landlords won't rent to single-parent families or to unmarried roommates. Still others, in the name of religion, reject unmarried couples. These unfair business practices must stop. Judges should not create “religious” exemptions from fair housing laws. Zoning laws must be changed so they do not prohibit unrelated adults from living together in areas zoned for “single family” use.

**Insurance.** Many insurance companies lump all unmarried people into one “high risk” class and then charge them higher rates on account of their marital status. Other companies refuse to issue joint policies to unmarried couples so that consumers are required to pay a double premium. Risk factors should be more tailored to an individual's lifestyle rather than group stereotypes. Joint policies should be issued to household members .

**Discounts.** Many businesses offer consumer discounts to spouses or family members. These perks should be available to any household member, just as the airlines now have “companion fares” or “friends fly free” programs.

**Taxes.** Married couples are not taxed by the federal government for workplace benefits or inheritance when one spouse dies. Unmarried people are taxed under such circumstances. Married couples, but not unmarried partners, can file joint tax returns. Cities have a transfer tax when an owner transfers property to a friend, domestic partner, or unmarried household member. Transfers between spouses are not taxed. Penalties based on marital status are unfair.

**Victims.** State laws will not allow an unmarried survivor to sue a drunk driver for the wrongful death of an unmarried household member. Only a surviving spouse or blood relative may sue. Unmarried people should have the right to sue a wrongdoer for wrongful death or emotional distress if a household member is hurt or killed.

**Children.** Some states will not allow unmarried couples to be foster parents or to jointly adopt a child. Some judges restrict visitation or custody rights of a biological parent who has divorced, forbidding them to live with an unmarried partner while their child lives with them or visits them. These restrictions are unjust. The best interests of the child should be the primary concern. Also, children of unmarried or divorced parents deserve proper financial support. States should be more vigorous in establishing paternity and collecting child support for these children.

**Palimony.** Courts in some states will not enforce cohabitation agreements made by unmarried couples with respect to the distribution of property or support payments should they separate. It is unfair for courts to enforce business contracts but not to arbitrate personal agreements between domestic partners.

**Family.** Many statutes and private-sector programs allocate benefits to “family” members or “dependents.” These terms should be defined in a broad and inclusive manner in defining eligibility for benefits or legal protections so that unmarried families are not excluded.

**Registries.** State and local governments are establishing domestic partner registries so that unmarried partners and their families may publicly declare their family status and receive legal protections. These registries should be open to same-sex and unmarried heterosexual partners alike.

**No protections.** Federal civil rights laws and similar statutes in a most states do not prohibit marital status bias in employment, housing, or business transactions. Elected officials should not leave 80 million unmarried adults vulnerable to such discrimination. Our political affiliate, Singles Rights Lobby, is working to close this gaping loophole in the civil rights laws and will also give a voice to unmarried Americans during election cycles.

**Self Esteem.** Many single people have low self esteem, believing they must marry in order to be “complete.” Many divorced people feel as if they are a failure, even though leaving an unloving or abusive spouse was the best course of action. Our educational materials show people that self worth does not hinge on one's marital status.

**Public Opinion.** Many people feel there is something wrong with a middle-aged person who remains unmarried. Some feel that divorce shows weakness of character. And others believe that unmarried heterosexual cohabitation or same-sex relationships are morally wrong. Our public education program promotes respect for the freedom of choice of everyone in their pursuit of happiness.

*Research, education, and litigation are functions of AASP. Political activities are a function of Singles Rights Lobby, the legislative advocacy affiliate of AASP.*

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