

Unmarried America



the promise of equality applies to everyone regardless of marital status

April 23, 2003

Mayor Neil G. Giuliano
City of Tempe
31 E. Fifth Street
Tempe, AZ 85280

Re: Overly restrictive zoning ordinance punitive to unmarried residents

Dear Mayor Giuliano:

The website of the American Association for Single People recently published a story about the plight of Amy Collins, a Tempe resident who is the target of a restrictive single family zoning law.

An outdated and possibly unconstitutional zoning ordinance in Tempe prohibits more than three people from living together in a residential area zoned for single family use, unless the occupants are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. As you know, Collins and her domestic partner had two roommates living with them.

Over 127,000 adults live in Tempe, and fewer than 57,000 of them are married. Since more than 55 percent of adults in Tempe are unmarried, and since more than 61 percent of the city's households are headed by unmarried adults, it would seem that city officials would be wise to reconsider the viability and relevance of this restrictive zoning law.

The Arizona Republic reported that you personally favor a review of this law, with an eye toward revising it to include "domestic partners" in the current definition of "family." This certainly would solve the problem currently faced by Ms. Collins and her domestic partner, who reluctantly asked one roommate to move.

Since you are an honorary member of the American Association for Single People, and since I believe that you support equal rights for everyone regardless of marital status, I am not surprised that you would favor some reform in this area of the law.

But the reform should not end with simply putting "domestic partners" on the same par with blood relatives. There are other groups of unmarried adults who should be allowed to live in residential areas without fear of having a zoning inspector knocking at their door with a citation. What about four seniors who are sharing a single family home for economic reasons, security, and companionship? The fact that the group does not include two people registered as "domestic partners" should not preclude the group from being allowed to live in an "single family" neighborhood. A "domestic partnership" is limited to two people, and it also implies that they are romantically involved with each other. The fact that a small group of seniors does not fit this model should not preclude them from living together as a single family unit.

So please make sure that respect for diversity and the right of privacy are considered when this zoning law is reviewed by the city council. As a fair minded person and a good leader, I'm sure you will do your best.

Very truly yours,

Thomas F. Coleman
Executive Director