**Wednesday, March 28, 2001**

**Portland panel recommends domestic-partner registry**<http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/members/news/2001/dpnarch/dpnewsarchive-03212001-03282001.htm>

A story published today in the Portland Press Herald reports that Portland, Maine may soon join 41 other U.S. communities that officially recognize gay couples and unmarried heterosexual couples as families.  
  
A City Council committee on Tuesday voted 2-1 to recommend that the city establish a registry to give committed couples new legal status as domestic partners. The proposal will go to the full council on May 7 which will hold a public hearing and vote on the proposal.  
  
Portland's registry would give domestic partners some of the same rights as married couples such as visitation at city health facilities, access to children and their records at public schools, and eligibility for any city programs or benefits offered to traditional families.  
  
Gene Rochow is a gay man who urged the councilors to recognize the commitment between him and his partner of 10 years.  
  
"We co-own our house. We have a joint checking account. We share everything that we can, and if we were allowed to get married we would," Rochow said. "It just doesn't seem fair to have absolutely no recognition of that."  
  
Kate Perkins said she is raising a son with her partner, the boy's biological mother. Perkins said, she does not have the right to attend parent-teacher conferences, see the child's school records or approve medical treatment. "(The registry) would make a profound difference in our lives," she told the councilors.  
  
The proposed ordinance however, would not extend rights such as visitation and treatment decisions at Portland's privately run hospitals. City Attorney Gary Wood said the city only has authority over public health-care facilities.  
  
In addition, part of the ordinance granting access to children and records in city schools would still have to be adopted by the Portland School Committee.  
  
The registry would be open to same-sex couples or unmarried male-female couples who pay $15 and proclaim they live together in an exclusive relationship "of mutual support, caring and commitment."  
  
Supporters said they hope Portland's stand will help convince other communities, and private institutions, to expand their definitions of family too.  
  
"It's a good and right thing to recognize these couples who make families in Portland," said the Rev. Marvin Ellison, a Presbyterian minister and Christian ethics professor in Portland.  
  
**Opponents of the registry also spoke to councilors Tuesday.**  
"This comes at a time when our society is crying out for a strong family value and structure," said Paul Volle of the Christian Coalition of Maine. It sanctions adultery and sex outside of marriage, he said.  
  
**The Rev. James Reynolds, pastor of the Deliverance Center in Portland, portrayed the idea as immoral. "This country of ours is fast moving toward the judgment of God," he said.**  
Councilor Peter O'Donnell, sponsor of the ordinance, had initially considered a companion proposal giving preference to hiring city contractors that extend family benefits to domestic partners. The idea of  favoritism and preferential treatment faced broader opposition and was officially dropped by councilors Tuesday.  
  
Most city councilors have already said they are leaning toward supporting the registry. O'Donnell and Tom Kane voted in favor at Tuesday's meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee. Jack Dawson, the third councilor on the committee, voted against it but suggested he may support an amended version.