



HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic

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Berkeley and Oakland Introduce Historic Nondiscrimination Bills Protecting Diverse Family and Relationship Structures

Berkeley, CA - February 14, 2024

In a coordinated effort, members of Berkeley and Oakland City Councils have introduced bills aimed at extending nondiscrimination protections to nonmonogamous families and relationships, alongside other non-nuclear family structures. These initiatives position Berkeley and Oakland at the forefront of progressive cities recognizing and safeguarding the rights of diverse family and relationship structures within the United States.

The proposed bills in both cities prohibit discrimination in areas such as housing, business establishments and public services on the basis of family or relationship structure. The ordinances protect diverse families and intimate relationships, including multi-partner/multi-parent families and relationships, step-families, multi-generational households, non-nuclear family structures, consensually nonmonogamous relationships, and consensual sexual and/or intimate relationships, including asexual and aromantic relationships.

Berkeley and Oakland are the first cities on the West Coast to introduce these bills, following the passage of similar protections in Somerville and Cambridge, Mass. in 2023. The introduction of these ordinances reflects a growing social understanding of the diverse forms that families and relationships take today, as well as increasing advocacy efforts by groups like the PLAC (Polyamory Legal Advocacy Coalition), which drafted the bills with support from the Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic and its students, and OPEN (Organization for Polyamory and Ethical Non-monogamy) which led a grassroots push for the introduction of the bills.

“Berkeley must stand united against discrimination of all kinds,” said **Berkeley City Councilmember Terry Taplin (District 2)**, who introduced the bill in Berkeley. “No one in a nontraditional household should find themselves unfairly excluded from public services or economic opportunities. As a gay Black Berkeleyan raised by a single mother, protecting our community’s diversity will always be a key goal in my public service, and families with nontraditional structures deserve our protection.”

“Oakland has always been at the forefront of efforts to promote justice and inclusivity. It is time that we acknowledge our large and growing community of diverse relationships and family structures, and ensure these communities have equal rights and legal protections in all aspects of life,” said **Oakland City Councilmember Janani Ramachandran (District 4)**, sponsor of the Oakland bill. “As Oakland’s first LGBTQ Councilwoman of color, I am committed to making sure our progress as a city is intersectional.”

“The introduction of these protections in Berkeley and Oakland represents an important step towards a future where all family and relationship structures are respected and protected,” said Brett Chamberlin, Executive Director for the [PFLAG](#), an advocacy organization working to advance rights and acceptance for non-monogamous families and relationships. “It’s also a testament to the growing power of the movement to normalize non-monogamy.”

“As society advances towards recognizing the diverse family structures existing today, we now see the nuclear model as but one of many beautiful options, with love—not structure—being the prevailing essence of family,” shared Dr. Heath Schechinger, Founder of the [Modern Family Institute](#) and PLAC Co-Founder. “Ensuring legal protections for all families, including polyamorous ones, reflects our shared values of freedom, security, and inclusivity, advancing a more comprehensive definition of family.”

“With the introduction of these non-discrimination ordinances, Berkeley and Oakland are poised to join three Massachusetts cities in being the first in the nation to extend legal protections to people with diverse family and relationship structures,” said Alexander Chen, Founding Director of the [Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic](#) and PLAC Co-Founder. “We are pleased to see California and Massachusetts continue their roles as national leaders in reforming our nation’s laws and policies to better serve all Americans.”

Diana Adams (they/them), Executive Director of [Chosen Family Law Center](#) and PLAC Co-Founder, commented: “Since 2007, I have represented thousands of clients in beautiful constellations of family beyond nuclear, including polyamorous families. I’ve represented many clients in child custody cases in which inaccurate stigma about being polyamorous was used against them. The impact of this nondiscrimination law on non-nuclear & polyamorous families extends beyond cities in which it passes. These laws raise awareness about the many forms of modern family, and declares discrimination against them unacceptable & unlawful. That reduces stigma for us everywhere.”

This move is applauded by polyamorous individuals and organizations across the country, who have long faced stigma and discrimination. These bills are an essential step forward in the movement for family inclusivity and recognition of the increasing diversity of families in the United States.

About the Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic:

The Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic (the “Clinic”) engages in cutting-edge impact litigation, legislative and policy advocacy, and public education on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community. The Clinic aims to shape the future of LGBTQ+ advocacy by focusing on advancing the rights of LGBTQ+ people as whole persons embedded in the wider fabric of society and their local communities, with a particular emphasis on issues affecting the most marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ community. The Clinic works with community members, advocates, non-profit organizations, educators, medical professionals, and governmental entities to advance the rights of LGBTQ+ people at both the national and local levels. Learn more about our work at hlslgbtq.org

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