



HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic

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Oakland Passes Historic Nondiscrimination Bill Protecting Diverse Family and Relationship Structures

Oakland, CA - The Oakland City Council passed new protections extending nondiscrimination laws to cover family and relationship structure, becoming the first city on the West Coast—and the largest city to date—to pass such protections. The Oakland ordinance follows the passage of similar protections in Somerville and Cambridge, MA in 2023.

The ordinance prohibits discrimination in areas such as housing, business establishments and public services on the basis of family or relationship structure. The protections cover individuals with diverse family and intimate relationship structures, 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.

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 [Organization for Polyamory and Ethical Non-monogamy](#) (“OPEN”) which led a grassroots push for the introduction of the bills, and the [Polyamory Legal Advocacy Coalition](#) (“PLAC”), which drafted the bills. Berkeley, CA has also introduced a similar bill.

“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 passage of these protections in Oakland represents an important step towards a future where all family and relationship structures are respected and protected,” said Brett Chamberlin, Executive Director for OPEN, 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 two 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 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 and polyamorous families extends beyond cities in which it passes. These laws raise awareness about the many forms of modern family and declare discrimination against them unacceptable and unlawful. That reduces stigma for us everywhere.”

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. They also come on the heels of ordinances in Somerville, Cambridge, and Arlington, MA, which allow more than two adults to enter a domestic partnership with the consent of everyone involved.

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 hslgbtq.org.

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