

SAME-SEX PARTNERS OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES TO RECEIVE BENEFITS?



Legislation has been introduced in the United States House of Representatives that would provide same-sex partners of federal employees to receive benefits. The same-sex partners of federal employees would be eligible to receive benefits such as life insurance, death benefits, retirement, health insurance and workers compensation. "The federal government must set an example as an equal opportunity employer," the bill's sponsor, Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) said. "If we are to treat all federal employees fairly and recruit the best and the brightest to serve in government, we need this legislation." The bill's co-sponsors include David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Barney Frank of Massachusetts, and Jared Polis of Colorado. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, from Florida, is the chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has also added her signature to the bill. "I am pleased to co-sponsor this legislation," declared Ros-Lehtinen of Baldwin's bill, "because we are a nation that prides itself on treating everyone as equals and this bill assures that we bring those same ideals to the regulations that guide federal benefits for domestic partners of federal employees. We have taken steps to gain equal rights for all, but much remains to be done. Passage of this legislation will be one step in the right direction." Joe Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut, had the following to say about the bill: "This legislation is the next step to achieving equity for the gay community. The Don't Ask Don't Tell policy was rescinded because we want the best men and women America has to offer to defend our country. The same is true for federal employees: we want to attract the best men and women possible to serve in federal government. One way to do that is by offering competitive benefits to the family members of gay federal employees. This legislation makes good economic sense. It is sound policy. And it is the right thing to do." Susan Collins, a Republican from Maine, had the following to say: "The bill represents both fair policy and good business practice. The federal government must compete with the private sector when it comes to attracting the most qualified, skilled, and dedicated employees. Today, health, medical, and other benefits are a major component of any competitive employment package. Indeed, private sector employers are increasingly offering these kinds of benefits as standard fare. Among Fortune 500 companies, for example, domestic partner benefits are commonplace." It would cost roughly \$70 million more per year through 2020 if the government were to extend benefits to same-sex partners of federal employees. "Considered as a share of the federal government's total budget for federal employees, this estimated cost would amount to only about two hundredths of a percent (0.0002)," explained the release. A federal employee will have to submit an affidavit that attests to the worker being involved in a same-sex relationship in an effort to deter fraud. The affidavit will have to prove that the couple has the same residence, that neither person is married or in a domestic relationship with someone else, and that they each share a common care for each other's financial obligations and welfare.