



**Federal GLOBE: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Employees of the
Federal Government**
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Federal GLOBE: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Employees of the Federal Government strongly welcomes the bicameral and bipartisan introduction of the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act. We urge the White House to strongly support this legislation and work with Congress for the speedy and long-overdue passage of this bill. We thank the Senate leads Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Susan Collins (R-ME), the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, respectively and, Reps. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) who will be the lead sponsors in the House. We thank all of those members who have signed on and call upon every member of Congress to support this bill. We note that in the last Congress, then Senator Obama was one of the supporters of the bill.

This legislation is important for the United States both because it will help the government recruit and retain the best possible employees and because it moves towards equity in benefits for all Federal employees. As Mrs. Obama has pointed out in her greatly appreciated visits with the Departments of the government, the civil service is hard working, doing the country's work, and deserving of respect. The Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act provides this respect and supports a portion of the civil service who currently do not have equal access to many of the benefits for their families which arise from government service.

We call upon the Office of Personnel Management to examine the experiences of those companies and governmental units in the public and private sector which already provide DP benefits for best practices and outline speedy implementation plan to put in place when Congress pass this legislation.

Federal GLOBE, is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit employee resource group for all government employees. It was founded in 1992 to provide voice and guidance to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees who faced harassment and discrimination on the job and in many areas of employment from initial hiring through promotions and transfers. The good news is that in the years since its founding, the amount and level of harassment and discrimination which LGBT government workers face has decreased in amount and form.

In 1992, the major issue facing LGBT Federal employees was discrimination during security clearance procedures. Federal GLOBE worked with departments and agencies to evaluate their practices and procedures and to eliminate this and other overt discriminatory practices, based on the rights which Federal employees have under the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act to be free from personnel actions which are based on "non-merit" factors. President Clinton, in issuing his 1998 Executive Order 13087 (which amends E.O. 11478), reiterated and made clear that there would be a uniform policy throughout the

"I am certainly glad this is finally coming to pass. I have been calling OPM about this over and over and over again."

In 2009, the major issue facing LGBT Federal employees is the lack of benefits for their families and the additional costs which this imposes. The Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act addresses this major concern. From daily concerns on health benefits for our families, to concerns about the retirement benefits we can leave to our loved ones, this standing inequality not only impacts our daily lives, but the government's ability to recruit and retain the best and the brightest for Federal employment. In this time of economic uncertainty it is even more important for this bill to pass and to provide loyal, hard-working government employees these benefits so their families can be more secure and enabled to work bringing the United States out of its problems and again be in the forefront of the world in innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership. This is not a new issue—Federal GLOBE, OPM GLOBE and many individual federal workers have requested benefit changes and additions for many years.

Federal GLOBE sent a questionnaire to our membership in August 2008 to gain increased insight into their concerns.¹ We received over 750 responses. Over 2/3 reported they would be interested in receiving benefits included in this bill, and most would sign up in appropriate registries as stipulated in the bill (though some felt it was discriminatory as such affidavits are not requested of heterosexual unions). They are currently paying an average of \$1,800 additional for benefits since they cannot add their partners and families to the government plans.

We would like to share some of the findings with you which reflect on the importance of this bill and their concerns. The themes we heard repeatedly were that LGBT employees were looking to Congress to treat us fairly and equally with other government employees. We heard that the lack of benefits were creating problems with retention of employees and with recruitment of new employees in this critical time when the baby boomers are retiring and the government needs well skilled, creative, and innovative employees. When we cannot compete with the private sector or many state and municipal governments, we cannot attract the best and the brightest.

Their interests are the interests of all Americans—access to affordable health care; benefits for their children, natural, adopted, and foster; retirement benefits to their families; and equal payment and support for job related expenses such as relocation expenses. Government workers in many agencies move cities and countries to do their jobs. However, many agencies believe they cannot support the movement of the whole household of LGBT families, creating increased problems and costs. The government will pay for the movement of an employee's car but not of their life partner. For our members in the foreign affairs agencies this is an enormous burden and increases not only costs for them but the danger to their families when they cannot get Embassy medical care, jobs, and, when necessary, evacuation in times of emergency.²

"I have had to turn down overseas assignments because my same sex partner could not obtain insurance to enable him to relocate with me."

We were struck with the number of comments we received from government employees that one negative impact of not being able to provide benefits to their partners is that it all too frequently stopped the partner from being entrepreneurial—starting new businesses, working for many not-for-profits, because these new or service organizations could not afford health care insurance packages. Providing benefits for LGBT government worker partners will enable increased development of small businesses and employment options for service organizations around the country and the world. As one person put it:

“My partner could not afford to take an exciting but risky position in a startup.”

A majority of our respondents knew Federal employees who had left government service to be able to provide benefits for their families from private sector employers. Not only is this a matter of simple fairness, the government is well behind civil society in this regard and cannot compete effectively. As one long-term scientist put it:

“When I joined the federal government 30 years ago domestic partner benefits were unusual. Times have changed- now EVERY university and major biotech partner would offer my partner /same-sex spouse the same benefits as an opposite-sex partner/spouse. I would not join the government today; they are discriminating against me.”

In order to remain competitive and continue to offer high quality service to the American people, the government needs to be able to attract the best Americans to fill the many jobs which are open and coming open within the federal government. All studies have shown that this will be an increasing problem for the government in the coming years and providing domestic partner benefits fully will enable the Federal government better compete for excellent and caring employees. As one respondent said:

“Each year I help recruit individuals for the DOE, and at every session I am asked if there are Domestic Partner Benefits. I think if the Federal Government wants to be able to compete and retain quality individuals, they need to consider following industry standards in this regard.”

All Americans, gay and straight, have the interest and need to protect their families and build lives of merit and caring. Government policy should not lead to irony, as stated so eloquently in this final quote we will use to illustrate the problems we face by not having the benefits which this bill would provide:

“Within the last year, my partner had to quit her federal position to be at home with our special needs child and we cannot afford private health insurance. She required emergency surgery a number of months ago and we now have over \$17,000 worth of medical bills. I think it is ironic that she cannot be on my health insurance policy but these doctors/hospitals want to hold me financially responsible for her debts since we have a house in both of our names. She cannot receive Medicare/Medicaid because I make too much money yet I cannot claim her as a dependent for tax purposes.”

¹ All of the quotes in indented italic paragraphs are from the comments we received from LGBT federal employees and contractors from this questionnaire.

² Many of the foreign affairs agency employees also articulated their issues with getting appropriate legal status for their partners from other countries, which is not included in this bill but is in the United American Families Act (UFAA) which Federal GLOBE also strongly supports.