

The Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service,  
and the District of Columbia  
Statement of Rev. Lorilyn (Candy) Holmes  
Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act of 2009  
H.R. 2517  
2154 the Rayburn House Office Building  
Wednesday, July 8, 2009

Domestic Partner Benefits for Federal Employees

Good afternoon Chairman Lynch and Subcommittee members. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in favor of domestic partner benefits for Federal employees. I am also grateful for the support of my family, a portion of which is here -- my partner Rev. Darlene Garner, my sister -- Beatrice Cook, my brother Arlen Holmes, and my great niece -- Elaine Conway who is also a lesbian. Thank you for convening this hearing.

It has been a long time since I have visited the Rayburn Building, where my father worked years ago as a laborer serving ice to these same hearing rooms. He would take me by the hand walking me through these very halls of Congress explaining -- this is where decisions are made that impact us all. I would have never imagined I would return to be speaking before you now on a topic of such importance to me and countless others. I believe my father is looking upon us from celestial heights -- proud that I am here. Thank you for holding this hearing.

My name is Candy Holmes. I am a Federal manager with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in Washington, DC. I have

worked at the GAO for almost 33 years. I have worked at GAO in various capacities – beginning my career as an editorial assistant and progressing to my current managerial position in GAO’s information technology department. I am here to speak with you about not only my story, but to express my views on the merits and need for legislation that ensures that lesbian and gay Federal employees and our same-gender partners receive the same benefits that are granted to opposite-gender married Federal employees. Though I am a dedicated GAO employee, I am not here speaking as a representative of the GAO. I am testifying on my own behalf.

It is also important for me to share with you that I am Lesbian and Christian. I grew up in the Baptist and Pentecostal faith traditions. And for the last 20 years I have been a part of the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) and am an ordained clergywoman.

The MCC is the world's largest and oldest Christian denomination with a primary affirming ministry to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender persons, along with our families, friends, and allies.

I am in a same-gender relationship with Rev. Darlene Garner. We are in a loving, longstanding, relationship in which we worry about our children, take pride in our grand and great grandchildren, make a home together, and plan our retirement together. We support and are supported by are sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, and extended family. We care for each other when we are sick and revel with each other in health. We cannot get married in our state, but we live as most married couples hope to live. The difference is this: the

Government, to which I have devoted 33 years of my working life, will not honor my partnership, because I am given to love another woman, not a man.

My partner, Darlene is also ordained clergy with MCC and serves as a part of the denomination's spiritual leadership. Because she is a MCC employee, she relies on limited employee benefits and a retirement plan that will provide less than \$120 per month when she retires.

I want to emphasize that I am not representing my denomination. I am testifying as a federally employed person who has worked for the entirety of her Federal career without the same employment benefits for my family that are granted to my opposite-gender, married colleagues as a matter of course.

Passage of the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act (DPBO) of 2009 would make a fundamental and positive difference in the lives of lesbian and gay Federal employees. Now is the acceptable time to recognize the inequities that have oppressed Federal employees who are in same-gender relationships and to redress discriminatory policies through fair-minded legislation.

There are many voices and stories you will not have a chance to hear so I determined that I would share from our collective experience of unfair treatment in the Federal workplace and to convey our enduring spirits in the face of unjust Federal policies.

I entered the Federal government in 1977. In that day it was enough that I was also dealing with the dynamics of being African American and a woman in the Federal workforce. So I was a closeted lesbian. I worked in utter fear that "how I am given to love" would be found out and impact work assignments, collegial relationships, and my ability to succeed. For this reason I chose to be silent and that rendered my life invisible.

Recently, I came to a "tipping point" in my life. The decision to uphold Proposition 8, the ban on gay marriage, sent me a stark, clear, yet unbelievable message -- discrimination can be legalized again. I was outraged! It became crystal clear that my silence was not going to save me nor ensure me equal rights. Out of that pain came the courage to speak my truth and be silent no more. So I am here to bear witness openly as a lesbian Federal employee who seeks fair and equal treatment.

Federal employees who are married to someone of the opposite gender are automatic beneficiaries of Federal benefits that are automatically denied me because my partnered relationship is not legally recognized as marriage. It is disturbing and demoralizing to be deemed a second-class citizen and worker, and to be told through unfair policies and unjust practices that I cannot enjoy the benefits of my labor on an equal footing with my opposite-gender counterparts.

Being treated as a second-class citizen is eerily familiar to me. "Same church, just a different pew." There was a time in this country when being treated differently because of the color of my skin was

simply the way it was. Being treated so unfairly now because of who I love is more than a matter of fairness; it is an issue of civil rights.

The lack of domestic partner benefits is in direct contradiction of equal employment opportunity policies. I have worked as hard as my opposite-gender married co-workers; yet my partner and I, as well as my same-gender partnered colleagues are denied access to the full range of employment benefits because we love within a same-gender relationship. When our partners lose their jobs and their health coverage lapses, we really struggle to afford the \$400-600 or more monthly premium for COBRA and other benefits. If we could add our partners to our Federal health benefit program, as our opposite-gender married colleagues are able to do, we would save up to 90% on the cost of insurance. Although we put in the same amount of work as Federal employees we cannot receive the same federal employee health benefits for our partners. Private health insurance can be more than \$5,000 a year for an individual policy that may not even cover routine health care. Many of our partners are without any health coverage at all.

We and other families like ours because of the current Federal policies will not receive benefits such as retirement annuity; workers compensation benefits; health insurance; social security survivor benefits; social security lump sum death benefits; or family optional life insurance, just to name a few. We should not have, nor expected to work without the same access to the same benefits that are made available to our opposite-gender married co-workers.

My partner and I are preparing for our retirement years now. Unless the DBPO Act is adopted now, the economic impact of my retirement on my family will be dire, as though I had never dedicated 35 years of my life to my career as a Federal employee. No opposite-gender married couple will ever have to even think about such a thing because they had been privileged by right of legislation. "Government should work for us, not against us. It should help us, not hurt us."<sup>1</sup> The Federal government's failure to legislate equality will also harm the Government itself because it will continue to lose its competitive edge when recruiting the best and brightest who will be seeking to enter the workforce in the future.

In summary, Chairman Lynch and Subcommittee members, the family benefits in question are a significant portion of employee compensation. Because gay and lesbian Federal employees do not receive equal pay for our equal contributions, it is clear that the DPBO Act would be a first step in the right direction toward eliminating discrimination in compensation. The Federal government should lead by example and strive to attain the highest level of fairness for its employees.

As I conclude, I would like to thank the co-sponsors from both the House and the Senate for your ongoing efforts to progress the DPBO Act to this point. I especially express my sincere gratitude to Representatives Tammy Baldwin and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and Senators Joe Lieberman and Susan Collins for championing this cause and for linking hands with mine and others on the arc of history to

---

<sup>1</sup> The American Promise. President Barack Hussein Obama. Democratic National Convention. Denver, Colorado. August, 28, 2008.

bend it once more toward justice. Though the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act is only one step toward addressing inequities impacting the LGBT community, I am hopeful that needed change will come and the light of full equality will shine on us all. During these days of uncertainty I remind us all of the words of our President -- "The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness,"<sup>2</sup> including Federal employees like me. There is no wrong time to do the right thing.

Thank you and God bless!

Chairman Lynch, I would be happy to answer questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

---

<sup>2</sup> Inaugural Address of President Barack Hussein Obama. Washington, D.C. January 20, 2009.