



The Legal Landscape

ALL OUR FAMILIES

While Lambda Legal's advocacy for marriage equality has received widespread attention, we actually have done more — and have a longer track record — seeking protections for lesbian and gay couples outside of marriage.

Some of our work has demanded respect for same-sex relationships through legal proceedings, such as when we assisted Karen Thompson in her battle to become the guardian for her partner, Sharon Kowalski, after Sharon was seriously injured. Other work has involved drafting domestic partnership laws, as we did for the state of California, or defending them against challenge, as we have in Broward County, Florida; Chicago; New York; Vancouver, Washington; and elsewhere. We likewise have sought to help couples who entered Vermont civil unions after other states failed to honor them.

While we believe that only marriage provides same-sex couples full equality, there are important reasons why we have kept this non-marriage work a priority as well.

In America, same-sex couples currently can marry only in Massachusetts, which has strict residency requirements for marriage.

To safeguard our families nationwide, it's critically important that lesbian and gay couples and their children be protected however possible while we continue to build support for marriage equality.

In addition, the forces that most strenuously oppose our freedom to marry also oppose our access to any rights or benefits. When they have attacked, Lambda Legal has rallied to action. In *Brinkman v. Miami University*, we recently warded off efforts to deprive committed domestic partners of health insurance coverage they desperately needed.

This work is essential because not all same-sex couples want to marry, even if they could. What we seek is the same *choice* heterosexuals enjoy of marrying or not. But whether married or unmarried, all families deserve basic protections. Even if marriage equality existed throughout America tomorrow, it still would be important to ensure that unmarried couples and their children, and those not in relationships, are treated fairly. That's why our domestic partner advocacy has extended to helping unmarried heterosexuals as well.

All our relationship-related work helps expand public understanding of same-sex couples and of our families' needs. From triumphantly reversing all remaining laws criminalizing consensual adult sexual intimacy to forcing businesses to provide committed same-sex couples the benefits they afford married couples to vindicating a lesbian's right to choose the inscription for her deceased partner's tombstone — Lambda Legal has been and remains committed to protecting *all* our families.

JON W. DAVIDSON
LEGAL DIRECTOR