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## Cambridge Becomes 2<sup>nd</sup> US City to Legalize Polyamorous Domestic Partnerships

March 9, 2021

Cambridge, Massachusetts

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Cambridge City Council passed a historic domestic partnership ordinance aimed at recognizing and protecting polyamorous and other multi-partner families and relationships. The ordinance was developed with detailed input from the newly formed [Polyamory Legal Advocacy Coalition](#) (PLAC), and is the first of what advocates hope will be a wave of legal recognition for polyamorous families and relationships in 2021.

Non-nuclear and multi-partner families are on the rise, and the law is finally catching up. An estimated 11% of people in the United States have engaged in a polyamorous relationship at some point during their life, but due to severe stigma and fear of discrimination, they often do not share their relationship status with family, friends, or co-workers. In July 2020, [Somerville](#), MA became the first city to allow domestic partnerships of three or more partners. Since then, other progressive American cities, including Cambridge, have seen community-driven demand for similar ordinances. To support this momentum, the [Chosen Family Law Center](#) and [Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic](#) teamed up with other mental health professionals and lawyers to create PLAC. PLAC, whose mission is supported by the American Psychological Association's Division 44 Committee on Consensual Non-Monogamy, hopes that the new ordinance, which makes Cambridge only the second city in the nation to recognize multi-partner domestic partnerships, will inspire other municipalities to pass similar ordinances. PLAC has drafted sample legislation to assist cities in establishing their own multi-partner domestic partnership ordinances, as well as non-discrimination ordinances to protect polyamorous families and individuals.

“Non-nuclear families—such as single parents supported by relatives, step-families, open adoption families, multi-generational families, multi-parent families, and polyamorous families—have changed the landscape of American society, and yet, many of these diverse family structures are not protected or recognized by the law,” said **Alexander Chen, Founding Director of the Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic**. A 2015 Pew Research Study shows that less than half of U.S. children below age 18 live in a family with two married parents in their first marriage. That means that many children live in families that do not enjoy the same recognition, rights, and protections as in the past.

**Diana Adams, Executive Director of the Chosen Family Law Center**, added: “The lack of legal protection makes non-nuclear families especially vulnerable to stigma and discrimination in employment, health care, housing, and social life. I have represented hundreds of clients who have been discriminated against because they’re polyamorous, whether that meant being unable to visit



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their life partner in the hospital, losing child custody in court battles, or losing their job. Legal recognition of these families reduces social stigma and provides families with the stability we all deserve. While non-nuclear families remain at risk, Cambridge’s ordinance will help confer both tangible benefits and symbolic recognition that we hope will inspire other cities to pass similar ordinances.”

“A review of case law reveals an all-too-common pattern among family law judges: they tend to discriminate against polyamorous parents. Many judges conclude, without supporting evidence, that people who engage in polyamory are less moral, less stable, and less capable of caring for their children compared to monogamous people.” **Kimberly Rhoten, Legal Issues Co-Chair of the APA Division 44 Committee on Consensual Non-Monogamy**, begs to differ: “Multi-parent families, including polyamorous families, can provide increased emotional, financial, practical, and logistical support for children—such as additional adults to help with homework, childrearing, or household chores. Further, because polyamorous relationships tend to require open and honest communication, polyamorous families typically foster emotional intimacy and communication skills in their children. This trend is reminiscent of historical discrimination against other groups (such as same-sex couples and interracial families) whose fitness to raise children was questioned based wholly on judge’s biases against their relationships as opposed to concrete evidence of their parenting.” **Dr. Heath Schechinger, Ph.D., Founding Co-Chair of the APA Division 44 Committee on Consensual Non-Monogamy**, agrees: “Research suggests not only that people in consensually non-monogamous relationships experience similar levels of relationship satisfaction, trust, commitment, and psychological health as those in monogamous relationships, but also that consensually non-monogamous relationships are especially conducive to fulfilling diversified needs and promoting individual growth.”

**Press Contacts:**

Polyamory Legal Advocacy Coalition (PLAC)  
[info@polyamorylegaladvocacycoalition.org](mailto:info@polyamorylegaladvocacycoalition.org)

Diana Adams, Esq.  
Executive Director, Chosen Family Law Center, Inc.  
(347) 994-9529  
[diana@chosenfamilylawcenter.org](mailto:diana@chosenfamilylawcenter.org)

Alexander Chen, Esq.  
Founding Director, Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic  
(617) 390-2656  
[achen@law.harvard.edu](mailto:achen@law.harvard.edu)