

## **ERW Domestic Partnership Survey Results**

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compiled by Andrew Kohler

### **Overview of Results**

Of 962 respondents to ERW's online survey for couples eligible to register under the newly passed domestic partnership law, 560 (58.2%) intend to register as domestic partners by the end of 2007, while an additional third (330, 35.1%) are considering registering but have not decided when they plan to do so. Of the 560 couples planning to register by the end of the year, 279 (49.8%) intend to register on the first day that applications will be accepted, 89 (14.5%) at the Secretary of State's office in Olympia and 190 (33.9%) by mail. 157 (28%) plan to register after the first day but within the first month applications will be accepted and the remaining 124 (22.1%) intend to register after the first month but before the end of the year. Of the 560 respondents planning to register by the end of 2007, over two-thirds (69.4%) have been with their partners for at least five years and two-fifths (41.1%) have been together for at least ten years, whereas only 1.6% have been together for less than a full year. 22.9% of respondents have previously attempted to formalize their relationship through marriages or civil unions not recognized under Washington State law, some multiple times. About one-third of respondents (32.1%) have children.

The following data pertain to the respondent couples planning to register in 2007.

### **Even Respondents With Some Legal Protections in Place Will Receive Additional Protections**

59.8% of respondents have preexisting legal protections in place, suggesting that, even among those interested in the security of a state domestic partnership, many LGBT couples have not secured all the legal protections currently available to them, either due to lack of information or lack of resources. While 50% have wills, 49.3% durable powers of attorney, and 47.1% have health care proxies, only 19.3% have declarations of remains. Some respondents noted that not only does the denial of marriage rights necessitate a burdensome and ultimately insecure legal process, it

also unfairly disadvantages those whose financial situations preclude them from hiring a lawyer. Further, many of the rights of legal marriage can only be granted by the state or federal governments. Couples registering under the domestic partnership law will for the first time have the right to sue for wrongful death in Washington State.

Perhaps the most significant statistic of the survey is that 40% of respondents have experienced discrimination due to the denial of civil marriage rights. While it will not alleviate all the problems of marriage discrimination, the new domestic partnership registry will be a significant step forward for many LGBT couples, providing new legal protections even for those who already have sought legal advice and making these protections more easily available.

### **Demographic Makeup of Respondents**

A plurality of respondents, 42.2%, affiliate with a Christian denomination, with 8.6% identifying as Catholic. Of the other groups represented in the survey, Jews (4.4%) and Buddhists (4.2%) were disproportionately high to the state population as of 2001, at which time each group was 1%<sup>1</sup>. 18.3% of respondents attend religious services on a regular basis.

The racial makeup of this group mirrors closely that of Washington State, both of which are largely white or Caucasian: 90% of respondents identify as white or Caucasian, as do 87.65% of Washingtonians<sup>2</sup>. The remainder of the respondents identified as Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, Latino or Latina, or mixed racial heritage.

A considerable number of respondents, 19.9%, are government employees at the federal, state, or municipal level. 19.8% are self-employed and 13.6% are members of a labor union. 60.9% reported a combined annual household income of less than \$100,000 and 35.2% reported less than \$70,000. 45.2% report that their employers already offer domestic partner benefits of some sort. In addition, 10.3% of respondents are veterans.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research\\_studies/aris.pdf](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_studies/aris.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington\\_state#Demographics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_state#Demographics)

## **Attitudes of Respondents Toward the New Law**

Respondents' attitudes toward the domestic partnership registry were generally enthusiastic but not without reservations. While many respondents were excited to participate in a significant advancement for equality, a large majority emphasized their desire to attain full marriage equality. Whereas in other regions LGBT advocates have feared that domestic partnership or similar laws will slow the forward motion of the pro-equality movement, respondents in the ERW survey overwhelmingly view the new law as a step forward. Several respondents further stated that they intend to register as domestic partners in order to avail themselves of all possible legal protections but are aware that, even with their new domestic partner status and preexisting legal documents, these protections still do not provide adequate security. For a few, registration will be a greatly celebrated event, but for others it will be greeted more as a legal contract that merely represents emergency protections. Several respondents noted the importance of registering simply as a statement, demonstrating how many couples have up until now been deprived of all the rights of marriage, and continue to be denied most of them.