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February 28, 2023

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
Somerville City Council
93 Highland Ave.
Somerville, MA 02143

RE: Amending the Code of Ordinances to include nondiscrimination provisions based on family and relationship structure.

Members of the Somerville City Council:

On behalf of OPEN (Organization for Polyamory and Ethical Non-Monogamy), I'm writing to express our support for amending the Somerville Code of Ordinances to include nondiscrimination provisions based on family and relationship structure.

OPEN is a non-profit dedicated to advancing cultural acceptance of polyamory and ethical non-monogamy. Our vision is a future where romantic and intimate relationships between consenting adults are accepted and protected from discrimination.

Many local laws were written assuming all households were a narrowly defined nuclear family. Recent studies have shown that only 18% of households meet the model of a married couple and their biological children⁽¹⁾. We believe Somerville's laws should be updated to reflect the lived experience of its citizens. These amendments address this inequality, expanding necessary protections to more Somerville families.

In 2020 Somerville made history by passing an ordinance allowing more than two members in a domestic partnership, but it did not codify non-discrimination ordinances to match. Without legal recognition and protection, many families face significant obstacles when it comes to accessing basic rights and resources. Without these proposed protections registering a plural domestic partnership can open an individual up to further discrimination, the loss of a job, or housing.

By expanding the definition of family and relationship structure to include non-nuclear families and relationships, such as polyamorous relationships, the City Council will be providing greater protection and support for these families. Recognition as valid and legal will help combat misunderstandings surrounding this relationship style, provide greater visibility and acceptance for all family structures and help reduce the social stigma and isolation that many individuals experience. This is an opportunity to create a more inclusive and accepting community that celebrates diversity and supports all forms of consensual relationships.



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Somerville is a proven leader in championing positive social change. We applaud your vision and encourage your continued support by amending Code of Ordinances sections 1-4, 2-326, 7-41, 7-44, 7-47, 15-31 and 12-102 to include nondiscrimination provisions based on family and relationship structure. Doing so will promote inclusivity, provide legal protection and recognition for these families, and help build a stronger, more vibrant community for all residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact me at lefty@open-love.org or (916) 296-4951.

Sincerely,



Bryan (Lefty) DeBlonk
Political Director
Organization for Polyamory & Ethical Non-Monogamy (OPEN)

Cc. Ben Ewen-Campen
Judy Pineda Neufeld
Kristen Strezo
Willie Burnley, Jr.
Charlotte Kelly
Jake Wilson
Matthew McLaughlin
Jefferson Thomas Scott
Ben Ewen-Campen
Jesse Clingan
Beatriz Gomez Mouakad
Lance Davis
Judy Pineda Neufeld
Anne Gill
Michael Feloney
Charles Femino

- 1) Article by the Center for American Progress (CAP), an analysis of the US Census Bureau data in 2020 shows that only 18.4% of American households follow the traditional nuclear family structure. CAP calculations are based on Bureau of the Census tables from the "Families and Living Arrangements: Historical Time Series": Table HH1: Households by Type: 1940 to present and Table FM-1: Families by Presence of Own Children Under 18.

