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January 25, 2007

Honorable Darlene Fairley
Chair, Government Operations & Elections Committee
Washington State Senate
John L. Cherberg Building, Room 227
Olympia, WA 98504-0432

Re: **Lambda Legal Supports Senate Bill 5336 – “Protecting individuals in domestic partnerships by granting certain rights and benefits”**

Dear Senator Fairley:

I write on behalf of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc. (“Lambda Legal”) to offer our strongest support for Senate Bill 5336 (“SB 5336”), which would provide some of the urgently needed protections for committed same-sex couples who currently are treated as strangers under Washington law. Lambda Legal is the nation’s oldest and largest legal organization advocating for the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people. Lambda Legal’s family protection advocacy has included providing technical expertise to legislators across the nation on dozens of bills relating to marriage, domestic partnership, and parenting rights and duties for same-sex partners, including primary drafting of the California Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act of 2003. Lambda Legal also litigates cases addressing these issues, and over the years has served as counsel or *amicus curiae* in several such cases before the Washington Supreme Court.

Lambda Legal believes firmly that the right way to remedy the systemic inequality same-sex couples face under Washington law is to offer them the same legal rights and status as the state offers to different-sex couples, which means an equal opportunity to marry. At the same time, we are acutely aware of the daily struggles, persistent vulnerabilities, and sometimes wrenching tragedies that same-sex couples face without the critical protections that SB 5336 would afford them. Lambda Legal is regularly contacted for legal assistance through our Help Desk by same-sex couples in Washington whose somber stories demonstrate the stressful risks and agonizing barriers their families face when, for example, one partner cannot provide for the other in the event of disability, or when one partner is denied the ability to make important decisions at the particularly painful time of his or her partner’s death.

Recognizing the important potential of this measure to address some of the very serious needs of Washington’s same-sex couples, Lambda Legal was honored to provide



technical assistance to Senator Murray during the preparation of SB 5336, and applauds his leadership in introducing this much-needed bill. Lambda Legal is pleased to offer our continued assistance to those with technical questions about the provisions of this bill or related questions about the legal needs of Washington's lesbian and gay couples and their families.

Until the State of Washington fulfills its core constitutional promises of equal rights and liberties to its law-abiding, tax-paying gay and lesbian citizens by permitting them to marry as their heterosexual neighbors and co-workers can, measures such as SB 5336 serve a critical role as stop-gap measures to reduce the daily harms that afflict same-sex couples and their dependents. We urge that SB 5336 be provided the strong legislative support and quick passage that it deserves.

Very truly yours,

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc.

Tara L. Borelli
Staff Attorney

Jennifer C. Pizer
Senior Counsel

cc: Senator Edward Murray