

Black Jack City Council is Anti-Family

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 17, 2006

Black Jack City Council is Anti-Family

Housing Laws Must Prohibit Marital Status Discrimination

The Alternatives to Marriage Project (AtMP) condemns yesterday's vote by the City Council of Black Jack, Missouri rejecting a proposal to allow unmarried families to live in this St. Louis suburb. AtMP calls on Congress to amend the Fair Housing Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of marital status nationwide.

Olivia Shelltrack, Fondrey Loving and their three children were denied an occupancy permit when they moved into a five-bedroom house because Ms. Shelltrack and Mr. Loving are not married. In Black Jack, anyone moving into a single-family home must apply for an occupancy permit. The city prohibits more than three people from living together unless they are related by "blood, marriage or adoption."

The Black Jack Planning and Zoning Commission proposed permitting occupancy of single-family homes by "two unrelated individuals having a child or children related by blood, adoption or foster care relationship to both such individuals," and by others related by blood, marriage, adoption or foster care to either of the unrelated adults. The City Council rejected this proposal by a vote of 5 to 3. As a result, the Shelltrack-Loving family and others could soon face eviction.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of 'familial status', which pertains to the presence of children under age 18, but is silent on marital status. Many state and local laws prohibit marital status discrimination in housing, but Missouri is one of 18 states that allow it. In Utah, the Provo City Council is currently debating a measure similar to Black Jack's.

AtMP Executive Director Nicky Grist said: "The Black Jack City Council is out of touch with the ways that American families live and define themselves. Their misguided attempt to legislate so-called family values will harm children and families. People from Missouri and around the country have been calling our office to express their outrage at what is happening in Black Jack."

Today 94 million American adults are unmarried, including 11 million who live with partners. About two-fifths of children are expected to live in a cohabiting household at some point in their lives.

About the Alternatives to Marriage Project:

The Alternatives to Marriage Project advocates for equality and fairness for unmarried people, including people who are single, those who choose not to marry, cannot marry, or live together outside of marriage. We provide support and information for this fast-growing constituency, fight discrimination on the basis of marital status, and educate the public and policymakers about relevant social and economic issues. We believe that marriage is only one of many acceptable family forms, and that society should recognize and support healthy relationships in all their diversity.

AtMP's Affirmation of Family Diversity has been signed by over 1,600 people. AtMP is a national nonprofit organization.

For further information, contact:

Nicky Grist, Executive Director: 718-788-1911