



Orlando Anti-Discrimination Ordinance Committee
Equality Begins at Home

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**MAYOR TERESA JACOBS ALIGNS WITH ANTI-GAY ACTIVIST JOHN STEMBERGER
AND KILLS THE ORANGE COUNTY DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP REGISTRY**

(January 10, 2012 – Orlando, FL) During her candidacy and early in her administration, Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs expressed support for domestic partnership registries and for legal recognition of domestic partner relationships through a DP registry. In an August 2010 interview with *Watermark*, Jacobs said, “I have figured out that we need something that makes it official that some relationships are bona fide relationships, and that’s where I think the idea of domestic partnerships or civil unions have more standing.” Subsequently, Jacobs promised former county commissioner Linda Stewart and community advocates that she would bring a registry before the commission for a vote early in her administration. However, now Jacobs has rejected the proposed DP registry, which was recently passed by the City of Orlando, and has adopted a sham proposal suggested to her last summer by John Stemberger, the man who successfully led the effort to pass the anti-gay “Marriage Protection Amendment” of 2008, and the leader of the virulently anti-gay organization, Florida Family Policy Council, an affiliate of Focus on the Family.

The Stemberger Plan, suggested to Jacobs in June of 2011, was that she not pass a DP registry that would grant inherent legal rights, that she not recognize gay families, and that she proceed instead with a “beneficiary agreement” form that would have no legal enforcement. The “beneficiary agreement” simply allows two adults to execute a document designating each other in various capacities and record the document in a county database. Jacobs has said she will not pass any new law to give any legal effect to the recorded document - rendering it completely useless.

Unlike a registry, a “beneficiary agreement” would not address situations involving the children of a domestic partner, would not provide proof of a domestic partnership for purposes of health insurance coverage or for hospital visitation, and is nothing more than a piece of paper that can be ignored by all of the hospitals, funeral homes, schools, etc., that would be legally required to honor the enforceable rights created by a domestic partnership registry. Moreover, Jacobs’ rejection of a county registry creates disturbing scenarios, such as situations where couples facing a medical emergency must choose whether to go to the nearest hospital or to a more distant hospital within the city limits, where their right to be with each other and make medical decisions for each other will be legally recognized and enforced by law.

Mayor Jacobs has been deluged with requests from gay and straight members of the community for a legally enforced registry, and with numerous accounts of incidents where documents similar to the proposed “beneficiary agreement” have been ignored in critical life and death situations. OADO calls on Mayor Teresa Jacobs to honor her commitment to bring the domestic partnership registry before the Board of County Commissioners for a vote, and implores her to honor her previous acknowledgment that all families are deserving of legal recognition and enforceable rights.

“She can say that she has expanded the realm of people that she’s willing to give a useless document to if she wants to, but she’s absolutely not in any way proposing to expand any actual legal rights. We all know people who’ve had those documents and they’ve been ignored, so please don’t give me another useless piece of paper,” said Orlando attorney Mary Meeks to WKMG-TV.