

COUPLES, INC.

February 12, 1987

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUTO CLUB "SPOUSE-ASSOCIATE" MEMBERSHIP POLICY TO BE CHALLENGED BY SAME-SEX COUPLES

A delegation of same-sex couples will attend the annual members meeting of the Automobile Club of Southern California to protest what they consider "discriminatory membership policies and practices." The delegation will include representatives from Couples Inc., the national organization for the advancement of lesbian and gay couples.

Los Angeles attorney Thomas F. Coleman and his spouse, Michael A. Vasquez, will present a list of grievances and suggest revisions to eliminate the discrimination. Coleman and Vasquez exchanged marital vows in international waters off the California coast on October 17, 1981.

The members meeting will be held at the Los Angeles Hilton Hotel, 930 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, at 2:00 p.m. on March 9, 1987.

Member dues in "AAA" are \$34, while "spouses" pay only \$12. The term "spouse" is not defined in the club's by-laws.

Coleman, who teaches a class on "Rights of Domestic Partners" at USC Law School, says the club's membership policies and screening practices may constitute illegal marital status or sexual orientation discrimination under state and local laws.

Membership practices of "AAA" were recently reviewed by a subcommittee of the city's Task Force on Family Diversity, Coleman said. That study uncovered "a systematic policy of discrimination against gay and lesbian couples," he added.

David Link, the Task Force member who examined the associate membership issue, said his investigation revealed that "AAA" routinely denies all "obvious" same-sex associate applications, but accepts all opposite-sex applications, even if the male-female couple's last names are different. The membership department does not ask opposite-sex members to verify their marital status, Link noted.

"AAA" management attempted to defend its screening practices, arguing it has "no means or ability to verify the actual marital status of its approximately 3 million members," Link added.

All "AAA" members who bring their membership cards to the Hilton Hotel on March 9 may attend the meeting, Coleman observed. "It certainly would make an impression on the management if scores of gay and lesbian members showed up to support this cause," he said.

For further information, Coleman may be contacted at P.O. Box 65756, Los Angeles, CA 90065 or (213) 258-8955.

THOMAS F. COLEMAN

ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR AT LAW

CENTER FOR PERSONAL RIGHTS ADVOCACY
POST OFFICE BOX 65756 • LOS ANGELES, CA 90065 • (213) 258-8955

March 9, 1987

Alice Cohen Bisno
Auto Club Secretary
2601 S. Figueroa St.
Los Angeles, CA 90007

Re: Proposed Amendment to Club's By-Laws, i.e.,
Change "Spouse" Associate to "Household" Associate

Dear Ms. Bisno:

Attached to this letter is a proposed Amendment to the By-Laws of the Automobile Club of Southern California. This proposal is being submitted by me on behalf of numerous members of the Auto Club. The background and necessity of this proposal are explained in this letter. We request that you transmit this proposal to the Board of Directors for consideration within the next 90 days at a regularly scheduled Board meeting. I request permission to appear at such Board meeting so that I can explain the proposal further and answer any questions that Board members may have. Please give me two weeks notice of such meeting so that I can arrange my schedule accordingly.

Having been a member of the Auto Club for 19 years, I have enjoyed my membership and wish to continue it. However, I, and other longstanding members, feel that the Auto Club's policies or practices should not penalize us because of our sexual orientation or marital status.

Several years ago (October 17, 1981 to be exact), Michael Andrew Vasquez and I exchanged marital vows in international waters off the California coast. Our marriage was witnessed by several hundred friends, co-workers, and family members.

That same year, Mr. Vasquez became a member of the Auto Club. We have both paid for full memberships for the past six years. Although we live in a spousal-type relationship, we have been paying more than our fair share in membership dues. As you know, the Auto Club gives many couples a substantial discount in the form of lower spouse associate membership dues.

It may interest you that my concern with the Auto Club's membership policies and practices is more than personal. As a lawyer and as an educator, I have been working professionally for several years to eliminate unjust discrimination against cohabiting couples.

Last year, I was informed by National Gay Rights Advocates (NGRA) that the Auto Club had taken a major step in eliminating discrimination against domestic partners. In the past, the Auto Club would not offer joint

auto insurance policies to unmarried cohabiting couples. That practice has now changed. Joint auto policies are now available to cohabiting couples, regardless of their marital status. I would like to take this opportunity to compliment the Auto Club on this reform.

Unfortunately, NGRA has also reported that the Auto Club refused to modify its policy with respect to associate memberships. The by-laws were cited as the obstacle.

This year I renewed my personal and my professional interest in the associate membership issue. On a personal level, when Michael's membership came up for renewal, I applied for an associate membership. On January 28, 1987, Michael received a letter advising him that the Auto Club was "not able to add Thomas F. Coleman to your membership as spouse associate." He received no explanation for this decision.

We then asked several other gay couples who were also members of the Auto Club if they had ever experienced a problem in obtaining associate memberships. We were surprised to learn that some had associate memberships and others had been refused. Some reported that they obtained associate memberships by using their initials rather than their full names. Only one couple reported obtaining associate membership even though they used their full (and clearly same-sex) names.

When Michael received a renewal reminder (2nd notice), I looked more carefully at the "qualifications" for associate memberships. The notice contained directions to "review instructions on the renewal statement for qualifications of spouse and dependent associates." I noted that the only qualification listed for a spouse associate was that the associate "must reside in the members household." No other criteria was mentioned.

I therefore reapplied for associate membership on Michael's renewal statement, only this time I used my initials rather than my full name. The other day I received an associate membership card in the mail.

From my professional perspective, I shared information about the membership problem with David Link, a member of the Los Angeles Task Force on Family Diversity. He contacted the Auto Club, asked for a copy of the by-laws, and also interviewed two employees (one of whom was a supervisor) in the Auto Club's Membership and Sales Department. A copy of his findings are attached to this letter. He was advised that the Auto Club routinely accepts all applications for associate membership, unless the name of the associate is clearly of the same sex as the regular member. All "opposite-sex" applications are accepted, and all ambiguous applications are generally accepted, even if the associate and the regular member have different last names. No proof of marital status is requested. As a result, the Auto Club probably has issued associate memberships to hundreds, if not

thousands, of unmarried opposite-sex couples (and some same-sex couples who slipped through on an ambiguity). Mr. Link concluded that these practices have a discriminatory impact on same-sex couples. His report has been given to the appropriate sub-committee, which undoubtedly will report the matter to the full Task Force.

The Auto Club's discriminatory practices have also been scrutinized by Couples, Inc -- the national organization for the advancement of lesbian and gay couples. A copy of their press release is attached to this letter. Recently, the local gay press reported on this story.

CONCLUSION

(1) The Auto Club has partially eliminated discrimination against domestic partners, by revising its guidelines so that unmarried cohabiting couples may obtain joint auto insurance policies.

(2) The Auto Club utilizes membership sales practices which allow most cohabiting opposite-sex couples to obtain spouse associate memberships, regardless of their marital status.

(3) The Auto Club utilizes membership sales practices which disallow most same-sex cohabiting couples from obtaining spouse associate memberships.

(4) These practices are unfair and need to be reformed.

(5) The by-laws, and/or the membership sales practices, may also violate state and local laws prohibiting arbitrary discrimination, marital status discrimination, and sexual orientation discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

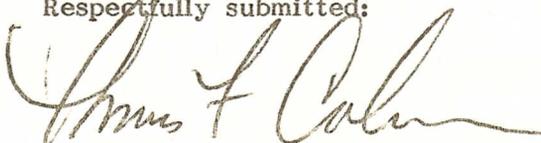
It is recommended that the by-laws of the Auto Club be amended by the Board of Directors and that the membership sales practices be revised to reflect the by-law change.

Section 2 of the by-laws presently contains two forms of associate membership: (1) spouse associate, and, (2) dependent relative under age 21.

The "spouse" associate category should be changed, so that "one adult residing in the household of the member" is eligible for associate membership.

It is further recommended that this proposal be considered at a meeting of the Board of Directors within 90 days.

Respectfully submitted:



THOMAS F. COLEMAN



Automobile Club of Southern California

PROCESSING CENTER: P. O. BOX 25001 • SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA 92799-5001

January 28, 1987

Michael A. Vasquez
4017 Division Street
Los Angeles, CA 90065

Dear Mr. Vasquez:

We are returning your \$12 payment because it is not the correct amount for membership renewal.

Member dues are \$34, spouse dues \$12, and each dependent associate \$13. Westways Magazine, if desired, is an additional \$7.

Please return \$34 to renew your membership through February 8, 1987. It is helpful if you write your membership number on your check. We are not able to add Thomas F. Coleman to your membership as spouse associate.

Your prompt reply within ten days will be appreciated. An envelope is enclosed for your mailing convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Shyrlene Somers'.

Shyrlene Somers
Correspondence Analysis Department
Membership Communication Processing

SS:ttv

Enclosure