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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## *Dangerous Nonsense*

### *A statement on behalf of Kentucky Equality Federation's General Advisory Council*

The Federation's General Advisory Council consists of 14 non-director members that oversee the Federation's position on social responsibilities, alliances, and issues of public significance.

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### **STATEMENT**

**By:** James Clifton-Spires, Political Advisor  
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**December 15, 2007** -- It is a disappointment, in the midst of much good will circulating across the Commonwealth of Kentucky at the beginning of a new gubernatorial administration, that some old, tired and discredited issues of bigotry are still being raised.

In Kentucky, homophobia is old, bad news --- and a policy that was soundly discredited by voters in the fall of 2007, with the rejection of Republican Gov. Ernie Fletcher's attempt to obtain a second term in office through the use of anti-gay campaign rhetoric. It also was discredited by the sound trouncing of his fellow Republican, Stan Lee --- whose radical anti-gay policy proposals contributed to his defeat in the race for state attorney general.

Those who pander to bigotry are not in step with the mainstream of Kentuckians who voted for moderation and progress. It is disappointing that apparently a few legislators --- led by Democratic Reps. Ansel Smith and Richard Henderson --- do not understand that Kentucky has always been --- and still is --- a place where all people should be welcome to live in harmony.

It is clear that Smith and Henderson, in bringing up a previously defeated proposal to block public universities in Kentucky from extending health benefits to unmarried, live-in partners of the institutions' employees, acted without the sanction of their own party. This has caused an embarrassing situation not only for party leaders, but for Democratic leaders and other party members within the Beshear administration and the Kentucky General Assembly, all of whom owe a debt to the many voters who believe in non-discrimination policies and inclusiveness.

Smith and Henderson both claim they were pressured by constituents to reintroduce the legislation, which would block universities that receive public funding from offering such domestic partnership benefits. Henderson, specifically, was quoted in the Lexington Herald-Leader as saying he received between "1,200 and 1,500 calls" from his constituents urging him to take the action. This would suggest that the people of Montgomery, Powell and Wolfe counties are

obsessed with denying partner benefits at a rate far beyond the people of the rest of the Commonwealth, because other legislators have not reported their telephones being overwhelmed in such a manner.

Likewise, it would seem odd that the most pressing issue that Smith, whose districts include Knott, Magoffin and part of Letcher counties --- communities where health care, education, and employment would seem like more urgent concerns --- has to do with micromanaging state universities' employee health care policies.

Regardless of whether the anti-gay lobbyists --- and make no mistake about it, the objection to the domestic partner benefits is based on homophobia, despite the fact that the policies cover opposite-sex partners as well as same-sex partners --- are large in actual numbers or only in a freshman legislator's exaggerated rhetoric, the matter is an issue of what is the best policy, in terms of fairness and good business, for the state universities of Kentucky and for the commonwealth as a whole.

Trustees at several Kentucky institutions, led by the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville, have approved offering health care to domestic partners of unmarried employees as a matter of good business. The policy makes the universities more competitive with other top universities nationwide, because it opens the pool of potential employees and appeals to the increasing number of private employers --- who can be drawn upon for financial support and to provide cooperative educational opportunities and investment with the universities --- who already extend health care benefits to live-in partners of workers, regardless of sexual orientation.

In other words, the universities' policies are good business for a state that is on the precipice of a new era of economic progress after four failed years of an administration that collapsed under its own prejudices and lack of vision.

In Governor Beshear's inaugural address, he called Kentucky "America's Next Frontier" and described his vision for the Commonwealth as being "a frontier that attracts entrepreneurs, tourists, retirees." Beshear also quoted one of the state's most illustrious native sons, Abraham Lincoln, who said, "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection." Beshear also urged the state to "put the interests of all Kentuckians ahead of the interests of political parties, individuals and special interests."

Along these same lines, the matter of inclusion is a moral and ethical issue. Moral, because all great religions preach that love and tolerance should trump all other rules for living. Ethical, because this country --- and the states that make it up --- was based on the premise that all people are created equal.

If our government creates policies that benefit its public employees, it should do so for all the employees, without discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, and yes, sexual orientation.

It would seem that Reps. Smith and Henderson, by pandering to whoever the group of noisy, homophobic voices in their districts allegedly are, did not get an advance copy of Beshear's inaugural address or if they did, they did not read it. The policies of the Beshear-Mongiardo administration, as the governor and lieutenant governor have indicated in past public statements, are not about exclusion, but inclusion.

Earlier this summer, Governor Beshear, said he would veto any legislation that attempts to tinker with the established policies of health care inclusion at state institutions. We urge the governor to stand his ground and also urge House Speaker Jody Richards and Democratic Caucus Chairman Rep. Charlie Hoffman to use their influence and powers to nip this dangerous nonsense, which is based in political pandering to homophobia, in the bud.

We also ask Governor Beshear's Labor Secretary-designate, Rep. J.R. Gray, to withdraw his co-sponsorship of the legislation, and make the same request of the other co-sponsors. This is not an issue with which the Kentucky General Assembly should concern itself at the beginning of what could be a bright, encouraging and inclusive future for the Commonwealth, or at anytime. Our elected officials should be working on legislation that improves health care access for all Kentuckians and not taking a discriminatory stand against one group of people.