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## Group Targets City's Morals

By ELLEN GEDALIUS

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TAMPA - A group that bills itself as trying to "improve and protect our moral environment" is taking aim at the city's policy extending benefits to domestic partners.

David Caton, executive director of Florida Family Association, said he and some sister organizations are looking for a domestic partnership benefit program to challenge, either politically or legally. He wouldn't name the other organizations or governments whose policies the group is reviewing.

The group has been peppering the city of Tampa with public records requests about the domestic partnership policy.

Caton says domestic partnership benefits violate the Defense of Marriage Act, which prohibits same-sex marriage.

"We're looking at the total cost to the actual taxpayers," Caton said. "We want to challenge the one that costs taxpayers the most and is most violative of the Defense of Marriage Act."

In 2004, Mayor Pam Iorio signed an executive order that extends city insurance benefits to the domestic partners of city employees. Applicants must show they have lived with their partners for more than six months and intend to remain partners. The policy went into effect Jan. 1, 2005.

Homosexual and heterosexual couples are eligible for the benefits.

The city has 63 employees signed up for domestic partner benefits, but pays additional costs for only 27 of them, amounting to just more than \$70,000 a year.

Caton said he might file a challenge in court, though he hasn't ruled out taking the issue to the city council.

"Now's the time to challenge that budget item," Caton said.

On Tuesday, Iorio said she stands by the program and is certain it will withstand any challenges.

"It's always been an issue of fairness," Iorio said. "Not everyone is married, yet the world is changing and

people have different partnerships."

Nadine Smith, director of Equality Florida, said she worries about the erosion of domestic partner benefits programs.

"It's sadly predictable that they're willing to invest time, energy and money in taking benefits away from families," Smith said. "It is the hidden agenda of Amendment 2."

Amendment 2, which goes to voters in November, would ban gay marriage in Florida.

Information from Tribune archives was used in this story. Reporter Ellen Gedalius can be reached at (813) 259-7679 or [egedalius@tampatrib.com](mailto:egedalius@tampatrib.com).

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