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SAME-SEX PARTNER BENEFITS APPROVED FOR PA JUDICIARY STAFF

PHILADELPHIA – January 29, 2010 – In his State of the Union address Wednesday night, President Obama spoke about his plans to repeal the law that denies gays the right to serve in the military. Perhaps this announcement will have a domino effect for gay rights on the state level. Yesterday it was announced that the Pennsylvania Supreme Court voted to extend medical benefits for domestic partners of gay and lesbian judiciary employees.

Beginning March 1, all of Pennsylvania's elected judges and judicial staff will be allowed to apply for these newly added benefits, which include medical coverage and limited dental, vision and prescription plans. This move follows legislation by Governor Rendell, who less than a year ago granted same-sex partner benefits to executive branch employees.

According to Justice Seamus P. McCaffery, who was appointed to the state Supreme Court in 2007, shortly after his election he was approached by a group of gay and lesbian judges who explained city workers in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh – even at the lowest level – had access to same-sex partner benefits, but elected judges did not.

“I was struck by the fact that the courts are the institution people are looking to to ensure equal treatment under law,” McCaffery said. When he took the issue to his colleagues, he received unanimous support.

“This is not just about benefits,” said family attorney Dorothy K. Phillips. “It’s a matter of equal rights. This is definitely a step in the right direction.”

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