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## **INCLUSIVE, POLITICALLY CORRECT HOLIDAY PARTIES TOP THIS YEAR'S CORPORATE WISH LISTS**

*Littler Mendelson Encourages Businesses to Welcome Diverse Groups to their Holiday Celebrations*

SAN FRANCISCO (November 29, 2006) – For many, December brings thoughts of good cheer and a Happy New Year, but for employers it induces an increased responsibility and worries of holiday party-inspired liability, including sexual harassment, drunk driving and discrimination. Although corporate America has embraced several different forms of diversity in the workplace, many companies have yet to establish a way to make their holiday parties a welcoming event for gay and lesbian employees, often resulting in interoffice tension and hundreds of thousands of dollars spent in discrimination lawsuits.

According to a survey by Battalia Winston International, 94 percent of companies will sponsor some type of holiday party for their employees this year, up by seven percent from last year; the New York-based executive-search firm has been conducting holiday-plan surveys of employers since 1988. With same-sex relationships and holiday party-related lawsuits also on the rise, now is the time for employers to modify their policies to be more inclusive of these diverse groups, according to Littler Mendelson, the nation's largest employment and labor law firm.

"It's essential for companies to recognize and acknowledge these unions that have traditionally been overlooked," said Jaffe Dickerson, a senior shareholder in Littler Mendelson's Los Angeles office and co-chair of the firm's Diversity Council. "Nowadays, if employers exclude these groups, or any others, they are flirting with a discrimination lawsuit. It may take additional planning and consultation, but with the proper strategies businesses can support these unions the same way they support straight couples at work events."

So what can employers do to ensure compliance and avoid any legal ramifications stemming from holiday parties? Dickerson offers the following recommendations:

- Create an invitation that makes it clear to gay and lesbian employees that their mate or date is welcome at the holiday party. Instead of using the word "guest," drive home the point by using the terms "domestic partner" or "preferred guest." This will serve as an advance notice to all employees and guests that it's a gay-friendly party, allowing any uncomfortable persons to either prepare themselves or decline the invitation.

(more)

- Lead by example: For employees to believe in a company's acceptance of gays and lesbians, senior partners and leaders must carry out the company's commitment themselves by bringing their own partners and/or significant others to company holiday parties. After all, if those at the top are not comfortable sharing such a personal aspect of their lives at work, why would more junior employees?
- Incorporate, don't isolate. Integration is crucial, especially if the company's holiday party involves a sit-down meal. Instead of making gay couples feel conspicuous and uncomfortable by seating them all at a "gay table," seat them at a diverse table with tolerant and open guests so that their sexuality is a non-issue, rather than the only issue. Having a senior manager at each table is also recommended. Such seating arrangements require advance thought but they foster an increased diversity and acceptance amongst employees.
- Use caution when making comments, negative or otherwise, about festive behavior exhibited by a homosexual couple. Whether it's dancing or kissing, homosexual couples should not receive higher scrutiny and public reproach for common behaviors. If a behavior is deemed inappropriate by all standards, a member of the senior management team should politely request that the couple behave in good taste.

To speak with Littler Mendelson attorney Jaffe D. Dickerson about issues and policies regarding the proper treatment of homosexual couples at holiday parties, or any discrimination and/or holiday issues pertaining to the workplace, please contact Jennifer Myres at (619) 234-0345 or [myres@formulapr.com](mailto:myres@formulapr.com).

### **About Littler Mendelson**

With more than 500 attorneys and 38 offices in major metropolitan areas nationwide, Littler Mendelson is the largest law firm in the United States devoted exclusively to representing management in employment, employee benefits and labor law matters. The firm's client base ranges from Fortune 500 companies to small-business owners. Established in 1942, the firm has litigated, mediated and negotiated some of the most influential cases and labor contracts in the nation's history. For more information, visit [www.littler.com](http://www.littler.com).

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