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Ten Questions Every Cohabitant Should Think About Before Moving In *

Professor Robin Fretwell Wilson **

If you answer yes to *any* question, then you may want to seek advice from an attorney in your jurisdiction who is familiar with your situation. Before moving in, a person should ask him or herself at least these questions:

- 1) Do you want to share your **stuff (like property acquired during the relationship)** with your partner after any break-up? Do you want your partner to share his or her stuff with you after any break-up?
- 2) Do you want to share your **income (like the wages from your job or earnings on investments)** with your partner during your relationship? Do you want your partner to share his or her income with you?
- 3) Do you want to share your **wealth (like your estate or inheritance)** with your partner if you die during the relationship? Do you want your partner to share his or her wealth with you if he or she dies during the relationship?
- 4) Do you want to **support your partner after any break-up** if that partner cannot support him or herself (by paying "palimony" or what would be alimony after a marriage)? Do you want your partner to support you after any break-up if you cannot support yourself?
- 5) Do you want to share your **debt (like credit card balances accumulated during the relationship solely in your own name)** with your partner after any break-up? Do you want your partner to share his or her debt taken in the partner's sole name with you after any break-up?
- 6) Do you want to **make decisions for you partner (think important medical care decisions)** if your partner cannot make decisions for him or herself while the relationship is ongoing? Do you want your partner to make decisions for you if you cannot make them for yourself while the relationship is continuing?
- 7) Do you want to be able to **visit your partner while he or she is in the hospital** if your partner cannot authorize you to do so for him or herself while the relationship is ongoing? Do you want your partner to be able to visit you while the relationship is continuing?
- 8) Do you want to be able to **include your partner on your benefits policies** while the relationship is ongoing? Do you want your partner to be able to include you on his or her benefits policies while the relationship is continuing?***
- 9) If either of you have children that are not the children of the other partner, do you want to be able to **visit your partner's child or receive custodial rights** after any break-up? Do you want your partner to be able to visit your child or receive custodial rights after any break-up?
- 10) If either of you have children that are not the children of the other partner, do you want to have to **pay support for your partner's child** after any break-up? Do you want your partner to have to pay support for your child after any break-up?

* These questions are intended for informational purposes only. They are not intended to be legal advice, but to instead serve as a guide to whether you should seek consultation with an attorney familiar with your legal situation in the jurisdiction in which you reside.

** Class of 1958 Law Alumni Professor of Law, Washington and Lee University School of Law

*** Some jurisdictions allow the inclusion of partners on benefit policies by permitting the couple to register as domestic partners or in a civil union. For more detailed advice, consult an attorney.