

# RUTH BERMAN & CONNIE KURTZ

b. Ruth Berman, 1934

b. Connie Kurtz, 1936

## EMPLOYEE BENEFITS PLAINTIFFS

*“We’re all entitled to equal treatment.” Ruth Berman*

**Ruth Berman and  
Connie Kurtz were  
the first U.S. couple to  
successfully sue an  
employer for domestic  
partner benefits.**

Ruth Berman and Connie Kurtz were the first same-sex couple in the United States to successfully sue an employer for domestic partner benefits. Their landmark case against the New York City Board of Education eventually led to the extension of health and dental benefits to the domestic partners of all New York City employees.

Born in Brooklyn, the women first met when they had husbands and children. Years later, they reconnected and both divorced. As a couple, Berman and Kurtz shared a commitment to LGBT rights and feminist activism.

In 1988 Berman worked as a health and physical education teacher at a Brooklyn high school. Kurtz was self-employed. The couple sued for Kurtz to receive medical and dental benefits under Berman’s employee healthcare plan. They won the case in 1994

and went on to become spokeswomen for LGBT rights, sharing their story on television and through other national media. It was the first time many Americans had seen an out lesbian couple. An emotional public outpouring led them to create Women in Discovery, the first forum empowering lesbians married to men to discuss their attraction to women.

Over the years, Berman and Kurtz helped organize Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG) chapters in Florida and New York and founded The Answer is Love Counseling Center. They served as co-chairs of the New York State NOW Lesbian Task Force.

In 2011 the couple, both grandmothers, married in New York just two days after the state legalized same-sex marriage. “Forty-two years we have been significant others, we have been life partners,” Kurtz said. “Now we are spouses.”

In 2015 a New York State bill, the Ruthie and Connie LGBT Elder Americans Act, was introduced to improve and protect services for aging LGBT adults.

A 2002 documentary, “Ruthie and Connie: Every Room in the House,” explores their lives and contributions as a couple. In 2016 they received the SAGE Pioneer Award.



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