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Experts: Gays no threat as foster parents

By David Robinson

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LITTLE ROCK - Experts testified at a trial Tuesday that children reared by gays are at no more risk of being mal-adjusted than if raised by heterosexuals, and that gays are no more likely than heterosexuals to be pedophiles.

Tuesday was the first day of a scheduled four-day trial of a lawsuit challenging a state rule that prevents gays from becoming foster parents. The 1999 suit was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of four prospective foster parents.

The nonjury trial is being heard by Pulaski County Circuit Judge Tim Fox.

Tuesday's expert testimony came from Michael Lamb, chief of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's section on Social and Emotional Development and Dr. Fred Berlin, founder of the Sexual Disorders Clinic at Johns Hopkins University.

Testimony also came from a Waldron man whose family has sheltered abused gay children at its own expense. William Wagner testified Tuesday that he and his wife of 30 years were not allowed to become foster parents because his adult son, William, is gay and sometimes stays in their home.

The Child Welfare Agency Review Board imposed the ban on gay foster parents in March 1999, saying that a traditional mother-father home is the best place to raise a child.

The board said it imposed the ban on households with gay adults in an effort to protect children from disease, violence, sexual abuse, neglect and instability.

Berlin said that heterosexual married men are just as likely to be pedophiles as gay men.

He said there is no evidence to support the contention that gays can't be as good at parenting as heterosexuals.

Lamb, who studies child development in traditional and nontraditional families, said the most important factors are the quality of the relationship between children and their parents.

He said studies of children raised by both homosexual and heterosexual people show no more behavior problems for children reared by homosexuals. He also said children reared by gays are no more likely to become gay.

Being raised by gay parents would not have negative consequences for children, he said.

He also said that children don't necessarily require an adult male as one of their care givers.

"It's become clear that the absence of a male figure is really not important," Lamb said.

He said children with behavioral problems rises from 15 percent in two-parent homes to 30 percent in single-parent homes.

"There's a clear consensus that children are more likely to be maladjusted when raised by single parents he said.

He said financial problems for single parents is a factor.

"Single mothers in particular suffer financial hardship," he said.

Other plaintiffs are a lesbian from Fayetteville, Anne Shelley, and two gay men from Little Rock, Matthew Lee Howard and Craig Stoops. They argue that the state rule violates their rights to privacy and equal protection guaranteed by the Arkansas and U.S. constitutions.

The state's welfare board uses an "ask, but you don't have to tell" eligibility policy for foster parents. Arkansas Department of Human Services case workers ask prospective foster parents if they are homosexual. If the parents say they are not, the state is not to challenge them.

The ban covers only foster children; there is no similar law or rule barring full adoptions by homosexuals

Nebraska is the only other state to ban gay foster parents; Florida and Mississippi ban gay adoptions, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

[Arkansas' ban on gay foster parents goes to trial Tuesday](#)

March 22, 2004



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