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Who's Your "Second Parent"?

Five Years Later, Health Department Updates Birth Certificates

BY CATHY RESMER

On July 1, 2005 — nearly five years after the civil union law took effect — the Vermont Department of Health's Vital Records Office finally updated its birth certificate forms to more accurately reflect the state's queer families.

Thanks to the civil union law, when a CU'd woman gives birth, her female partner's name is automatically entered on the birth certificate as the child's "second parent." But until this July, medical records clerks had no choice but to enter this information in the box marked "father's name." That heading was then manually, messily crossed out.

That's what happened to Kendra Henson-Stroud and her female partner, Max, when their son Connor was born in March. Max Henson-Stroud says that when the clerk came by their hospital room to collect the birth certificate details, she had to use a Sharpie to black out the line that read, "father's name." "She was really nice, and polite, and wonderful," says Max. "She apologized that the forms hadn't been changed yet."

Cindy Hooley, Vital Statistics Information Manager, explains that the Health Department has just introduced new forms that replace

the outdated language. Now, clerks will enter all birth details into a web-based system. This new system is capable of printing birth certificates that have boxes for both "mother" and "second parent." Once they're printed off the computer, the certificates are then sent or brought to the town clerk; the office of Vital Records also receives a copy.

Hooley adds that state law requires all birth certificates to list the mother's medical information. Two civil unioned men who have a child through a surrogate mother would still be required to put the mother's name on the birth certificate, though the document would be amended during a second-parent adoption process.

So why did it take five years for the state to create new forms? Hooley, who has held her position for three years, says at first, "there wasn't a demand for it, as I understand ... There were so few to start with it didn't seem to make much sense." She claims the Health Department has received a few complaints about the outdated forms, but says there haven't been many.

It's not an issue that has provoked organized outrage. Max Henson-Stroud says it didn't bother her. "I was so relieved to know I was going to be on the birth certificate as a parent that I didn't care," she says.

Sarah Page, who gave birth three years ago, says she and her partner



Max and Kendra Henson-Stroud with baby Connor. Both women's names appear on Connor's birth certificate as parents, and new forms will specify "mother" and "parent."

PARENTS	
6. MOTHER'S NAME - (FIRST, MIDDLE, LAST, SUFFIX)	
8. MOTHER'S BIRTH NAME - (LAST NAME ONLY)	
10a. RESIDENCE OF MOTHER - STREET AND NUMBER	
11. PARENT'S NAME - (FIRST, MIDDLE, LAST, SUFFIX)	
13. PARENT'S BIRTHPLACE - (STATE OR FOREIGN COUNTRY)	
CERTIFIER	

The revised Vermont Certificate of Live Birth

Kara DeLeonardis had to have their daughter's birth certificate manually altered, but she wasn't particularly bothered by the process, either. "Honestly," she says, "I felt like it was a great thing that we could both put ourselves on the birth certificate. I just remember being so happy that we didn't have to jump through hoops."

Still, Cindy Hooley seems sheep-

ish when explaining the delay in creating the new forms, when other state agencies came into compliance with the civil unions law long ago. "We should have it," she says.

And now, finally, after five years, we do. And lesbian and gay couples who are new parents can ask for it — another acknowledgment that our families count. ▼

When the clerk came to collect the birth certificate details, she had to use a Sharpie to black out the line that read, "father's name." "She apologized that the forms hadn't been changed yet!"

— MAX HENSON-STROUD

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