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NEW YORK, NY

Gay and Lesbian Adoptions Promising

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute released a new report in March that finds there is no child-centered reason to prevent gays and lesbians from becoming adoptive parents, and recommends that they be utilized more extensively to provide permanent, loving homes for children living in state care across the country, the Human Rights Campaign reported.

"Based on both the available research and growing experience, adoption by gays and lesbians holds promise as an avenue for achieving permanency for many of the waiting children in foster care," the report said in its conclusion.

The Institute report - which is part of a larger, more extensive yearlong project that will be completed and released in several months - is intended to provide a research-based context for the ongoing debate in the United States over the adoption of children by gays and lesbians, according to the HRC. The Institute seeks to develop information to help shape the best practices that focus on providing boys and girls in the child welfare system with safe, committed and enduring families.

WASHINGTON, DC

Pentagon Admits Spying on Gay Groups

The Department of Defense (DOD) has released documentation confirming government surveillance of groups opposed to the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law banning openly lesbian, gay and bisexual service members, according to a report from the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending discrimination against LGBT military personnel.

The government's TALON reports were released in response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed in January, SLDN said.

"The Department of Defense has now confirmed the existence of a surveillance program monitoring LGBT groups," said C. Dixon Osburn, executive director of SLDN. "Pentagon leaders have also acknowledged inappropriately collecting some of the information in the TALON database. That information should be destroyed and no similar surveillance should be authorized in the future. Free expression is not a threat to our national security."

LOS ANGELES

Visitation with HIV-Positive Inmates Allowed

In response to a demand letter from the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, the state Department of Corrections has concluded that excluding HIV-positive inmates from its spousal family visitation program is discriminatory and contrary to federal law.

The ACLU of Southern California sent the letter after a couple who had been married for four years was excluded from family visits, even though the wife agreed to sign a document acknowledging that she was aware of her husband's HIV status, the ACLU reported.

"We are pleased that the Department of Corrections recognized its mistake swiftly," said ACLU of Southern California staff attorney Christine P. Sun. "A blanket rule that discriminates against and isolates those with HIV sends the wrong message and is illegal. Cutting off inmates from their spouses just because they have HIV not only irreparably harms their relationship, but also wrongfully discriminates on the basis of disability."

WASHINGTON, DC

Groups Train Political Candidates of Color

A Candidate & Campaign Training to be held here in June seeks to attract potential LGBT political candidates of color. The four-day program will cover strategy, planning, messaging and fundraising, according to a report from the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund and Leadership Institute, which has helped elect hundreds of out LGBT candidates since 1991. The Fund is working with the National Black Justice Coalition to help LGBT candidates of color win elections at all levels of government.

As part of the program, Cambridge, Massachusetts Mayor Ken Reeves and City Commissioner Kecia Cunningham of Decatur, Georgia will discuss running for office as an openly gay or lesbian African American. During the intensive four-day training, attendees learn from top political strategists during the day and work with their peers on a complex campaign simulation at night. The simulation models a real campaign, complete with district background, media information and voter files. ▼

vermont news

VERMONT NEWS

Windham County Sheriff Denies Misuse of Public Funds

BRATTLEBORO — Windham Sheriff Sheila Prue, allegedly responsible for mismanagement of department funds and insufficient training of employees, has turned over financial control but so far has refused to step down from her post, news sources say. State legislators planned to discuss a possible resolution to remove Prue from her elected office at a meeting in late April.

Prue, a Democrat who was elected as sheriff in 2002, has denied any wrongdoing, according to reports.

A Bennington native, Prue served in the army and later worked for the Brattleboro police department for 14 years. She and her partner later bought the Upper Crust Bakery in Brattleboro.

Prue ran for office as an open lesbian, but she did not consider her sexual orientation to be a big issue during her campaign, according to an article published in the December 2002 issue of *OITM*. However, when accusations made by Vermont State Auditor Randy Brock were made public last month, Prue's attorney, Tina Buehler, told the *Brattleboro Reformer* that she believed Brock's report was "politically motivated" and "an attack on Prue's gender as well as 'an attack of the sheriff's personal sexual preference.'"

Brock, a Republican, termed the accusations "ridiculous."

On April 11th, Brock released a report alleging that Prue used \$61,000 of department funds for a variety of personal uses, including home phone and travel expenses. About \$9,000 worth of health insurance co-payments was also billed to the sheriff's department, the *Rutland Herald* reported.

Buehler released past financial reports showing that former county sheriffs also were reimbursed for health care and home telephone costs.

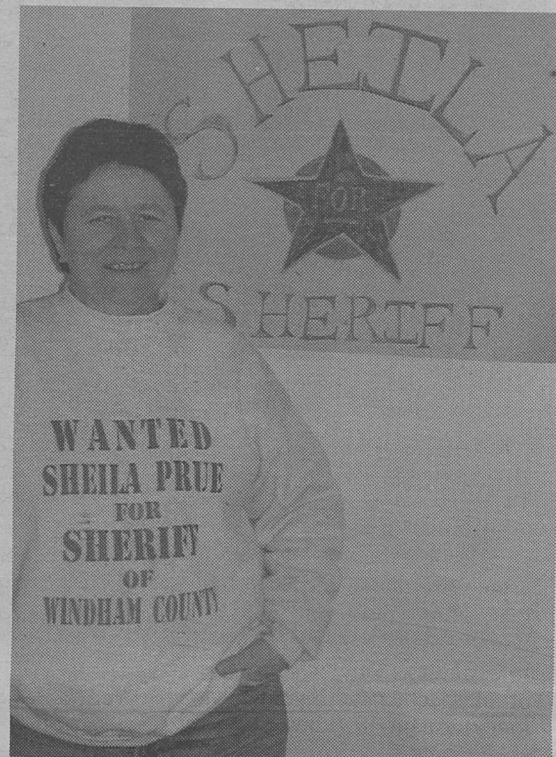
But Brock said Prue's charges went "above and beyond what might be considered reasonable in the law enforcement field," the *Herald* said.

Brock turned over the report to the Vermont Attorney General and U.S. Justice Department for possible criminal charges, according to the *Herald*.

In 2004, several deputies complained to Rep. Patricia O'Donnell, R-Vernon, that they were not adequately trained by the sheriff's department, the *Herald* said. O'Donnell subsequently filed a complaint with the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council. One month later, the Vermont Attorney General's Office took over the investigation and found that Sgt. Ron Lake, the department's primary field training officer, had signed off on training sessions after his certification had expired, the newspaper said. Buehler said Sgt. Lake appears to be certified through 2007.

In addition, Brock said a \$225,000 federal grant intended to support employment of officers was in question because of Prue's actions. The audit includes allegations that paychecks were delayed due to the department's lack of funds.

In conjunction with the audit, Brock asked Prue to step aside from financial management of the sheriff's department. A few days later, Prue chose Lt. Sherwood Lake, Jr. (brother of Sgt. Ron Lake) to oversee the department's finances, a move criticized by Brock as "inappropriate," the *Brattleboro Reformer* said.



FILE PHOTO, DEC. 2002

"I'm not sure if we will be asking her to step down or get out of the way so the department can function."

REP. PATTY O'DONNELL, R-VERNON

"I do question giving any financial management authority to a member of the previous financial management team," the *Reformer* quoted Brock. He said an independent accounting firm should be managing the books.

In response to Brock's audit and allegations, Prue has hired an independent firm to conduct a "forensic" audit of the department's books, according to the *Reformer*. Brock said Windham County may pick up at least part of the tab for the audit and that may be acceptable as long as it is for the sheriff's department and not for the sheriff personally.

Vermont Attorney General William Sorrell said his office would begin a criminal investigation based on Brock's report.

"Some very serious questions were raised by the auditor's report and we'll take them seriously," Sorrell told the *Reformer*.

O'Donnell said that legislators from Windham County planned to discuss the possibility of a resolution asking Prue to resign, the *Reformer* said.

"I'm not sure if we will be asking her to step down or get out of the way so the department can function," the *Reformer* quoted O'Donnell, who organized the meeting. At least two other legislators said it's premature to make such a resolution and that Prue has not been found guilty of any crimes.

Prue did not return phone calls from *OITM*. ▼