

A Grave Amendment: Adoption reform shelved for another year

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Europe grapples with public sex

AMSTERDAM/ BRIGHTON -- The Amsterdam City Council recently turned down a proposal to accommodate gays who have sex in public toilets and parks. A committee of city bureaucrats and gay leaders had urged the council to order that public toilet stalls be big enough for two people, that toilets not be demolished or moved without consent of gay leaders, and that trees, hedges and bushes in parks not be cut so short that men who have sex could not hide in them. The committee urged civil servants to respect the "alternative usage" of undergrowth. But the City Council was unswayed, saying that safety for all users of public spaces is more important than protecting the activities of a few.

A similar hortological dilemma, in Brighton, England, had a different outcome. City workers were ordered to stop chopping down shrubs at Duke's Mound when they learned men used the location for sex. "I didn't realize Duke's Mound had another function when work began," said Mike Sansom of Brighton Council's Environmental Services Department. "When I was told, work was stopped and we reconsidered our plans. We're trying to be as sensitive as we can but we have a duty to tidy it up." New plans call for the shrubs to be cut in strips five meters long with 10-meter gaps between them so that some cover remains. The bushes have been a gay-cruising ground for at least 50 years, according to the London weekly *Capital Gay*. (*Frontiers*)

International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization

SAN FRANCISCO -- The 12th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization will be observed worldwide on Sunday, May 21, 1995. The event, which began in San Francisco in 1983, honors the memory of those who have died of AIDS and demonstrates support for people living with HIV and AIDS. It is the world's largest annual community-based AIDS event. 243 cities in 45 nations participated last year, and for the first time the event was observed in all 50 states in the U.S.

The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization is coordinated under the auspices of Mobilization Against AIDS, a San Francisco-based non-profit AIDS advocacy organization. MAA supplies event coordination kits to local groups, such as AIDS service organizations and churches, which then coordinate observances of the event in their cities. Local observances range in character from small gatherings in houses of worship to huge marches through city centers.

"A single person, without previous experience, can bring the Candlelight to his or her town with our guidance and support," program director Ben Carlson said. "We urge those who care about the HIV/AIDS pandemic to get involved. People are still dying of AIDS. The Candlelight is a powerful way to get that message across."

In some cases, participation in the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization marks a community's first acknowledgment that AIDS is a local issue, as well as a national and global issue. In addition to raising awareness, the event offers a public demonstration of compassion and solidarity to people whose illness often makes them the target of fear, hatred and discrimination.

Anyone interested in organizing an AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization in their area may call Mobilization Against AIDS at (415)863-4676. ▼

struggles over gay marriage, this amendment conspicuously specified "a husband and wife," rather than "married couples." This Health & Welfare Amendment, which became widely identified as the "Graves Amendment," was confirmed by a 3-2 vote (Sen. Helen Riehle (R-Chittenden) and Sen. Nancy Chard (D-Windham) opposed), and the Adoption Reform Bill and its amendment moved to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

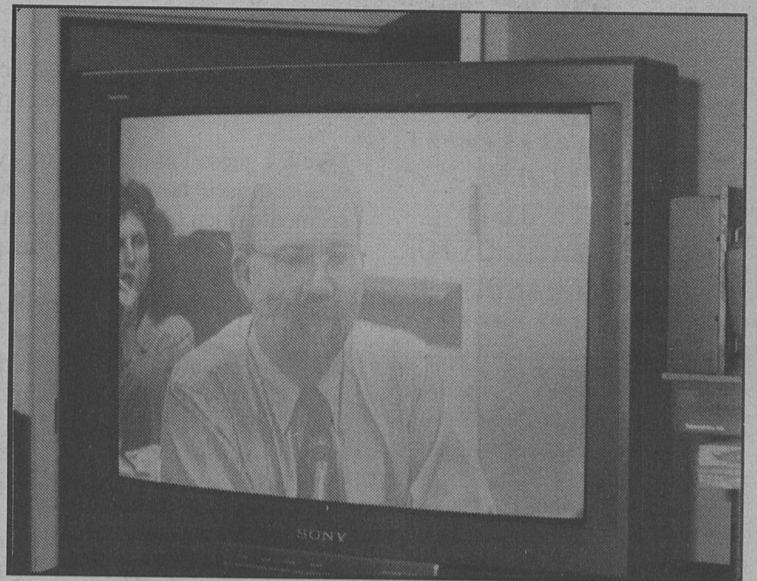
The Judiciary Committee heard testimony on the Adoption Reform Bill on Wednesday, March 15, over Vermont Interactive Television. The Adoption Task Force of the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VCLGR) prepared a list of witnesses for presentation to the Judiciary Committee, and coordinated the testimony of those witnesses. In all, 33 people testified in opposition to the Health & Welfare Amendment, 3 people testified in favor of the Amendment, and 29 individuals testified on other aspects of the Reform Bill.

Citing the well prepared and focused testimony orchestrated by VCLGR, the Senate Judiciary Committee, on Friday, March 17, voted 4-2 to not concur with the Amendment forwarded from the Health & Welfare Committee. Judiciary Committee members Graves and Bloomer, co-drafters of the original amendment, voted in favor, while Chairperson Sen. Susan Sweetser (R-Chittenden); Sen. Ruth Harvie (R-Windsor); Sen. Vincent Illuzzi (R-Essex-Orleans); and Sen. Dick Sears (D-Bennington) opposed the "Graves Amendment." In a second vote on an alternate amendment, crafted by Sen. Sears, the Judiciary Committee split the vote (Illuzzi voting with Graves and Bloomer), effectively stalemating the Committee on this issue. Chairperson Sweetser has indicated that the Judiciary Committee will continue its study of adoption reform during the summer and fall, in anticipation of an early resubmission of an Adoption Reform Bill in the 1996 legislative session.

The Adoption Reform Bill has been the subject of intense scrutiny by VCLGR and Vermont's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community at large. The Vermont Supreme Court's acceptance of second-parent adoption between two women was based on the finding that this arrangement was in the best interests of the children involved. During preliminary trials in the Lashman-van Buren suit, psychologists testified that the proposed adoption was important to the emotional well-being of the children, as it specifically enhanced the emotional connections between parent and child.

This "best interests of the child" strategy was embraced by VCLGR. It was generally perceived that legislators would not be receptive to having adoption reform framed as a gay rights issue, as concerns had been raised that gays and lesbian couples might attempt to legitimize their own relationships by adopting children together, such adoption serving as a surrogate for marriage. VCLGR chose instead to promote the retention of

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(Photo: Bennett Law)

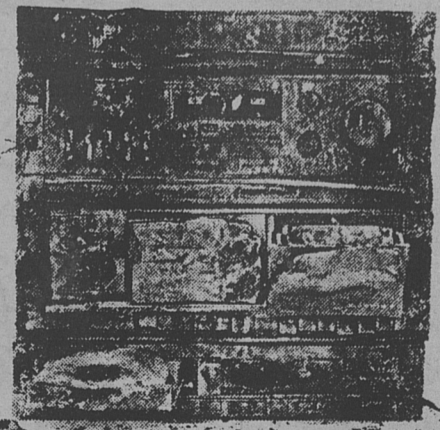
Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg) described how a bill becomes a law

all possible options in any adoption situation, so that the best interests of the child may be fully protected and realized.

In response to the heightened interest and activity surrounding adoption reform, VCLGR rearranged agenda topics for its "Fourth Friday" Series, taking up adoption reform at its March 24th statewide meeting. At that gathering, attended by 45 people from seven sites around the state, Deborah Lashman gave a full and moving recounting of her struggles in adopting her two sons through a second-parent adoption here in Vermont. Mary Hurlie and Susan Aranoff, who acted as liaisons between VCLGR and the legislature, presented an update of the history surrounding adoption reform in Vermont, as well as an explanation of the actions taken and lessons learned in battling the Health & Welfare Amendment during the 1995 legislative session. Representative Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg) described the process that a bill like the Adoption Reform Bill goes through, and the many decision-making points along the way to becoming law.

Also on the panel of invited speakers were attorneys Beth Robinson and David Curtis. Ms. Robinson noted that the Health & Welfare Amendment would not prevent lesbians and gays from forming the families that they want to form, but would present a barrier to the children in those families from getting the kind of emotional support they need. Ms. Robinson also noted that from a purely economic standpoint, second-parent adoption appears to be in the best interests of the state as it places responsibility for the adopted child in the hands of more adults, which would presumably result in greater financial stability for the child. Mr. Curtis who with his adopted son Christopher testified in opposition to the "Graves Amendment" before the Judiciary Committee on March 15, noted that the Health & Welfare Amendment would exclude whole classes of people from the adoption process which could not be in the best interests of Vermont's children.

See related story, "A Communication from Senator Graves," on page 9. ▼



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