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February 8, 1993

To the Valley News;

With regards to your Feb. 5, 1993 story on Vermont's new adoption laws ("Changes Proposed in Vermont Adoption Laws"), I would like to make two short comments.

In almost all respects, these laws are progressive, child-oriented, and generally, on the right track, especially in their commitment to the availability of information regarding the adoption to all concerned parties. However, the use of the word "natural" to refer to non-adopted children or non-adoptive parents bothers me, as it does many adoptive parents. Since there is nothing "unnatural" about adopting a child, a far more appropriate word is "biological" to distinguish between these two flavors of family. In the literature on adoption, this is becoming a kind of standard, and it's not just an arbitrary word choice. These kinds of unfortunate and anachronistic words are often responsible for unnecessary stigmas that adopted kids have to deal with.

Second, the issue of adoption by non-married couples is a complex one. At first glance, the Vermont law's prohibition of adoption by a non-married couple seems seriously (and frighteningly) homophobic as well as foolishly biased towards some no longer relevant model of the traditional family. There are as many types of families, I hope, as there are families. Love and commitment to parenting are the issues, not gender, sexual preference, or how many parents there are. A loving, functional single-parent or gay family is immensely preferable to a dysfunctional two-parent heterosexual family. Single parent adoption is permitted by many states, and from the Valley News article, it is not clear how the new Vermont laws will deal with this. I would hope, and expect from their generally enlightened character, that single parent adoption will be legal. It is feasible, in most cases that I have seen, for gay individuals or single mothers or fathers to adopt (I don't really have the state-by-state data on this, I would be interested in seeing it if someone does). However, because of our homophobic marital laws, adoption often necessitates duplicity on the part of a gay couple. They must pretend not to be a "couple" for the purposes of adoption, often with the willing complicity of the home-study social worker (this is also

the case with a non-married non-gay couple: only one of the two can legally adopt the child). The distinction between "married" and "unmarried" affords a purely legal way of determining, for the sake of the child, who is the legal parent. There may be unfortunate consequences for the non-legally-adoptive member of a couple which splits up for some reason, since that parent may not have any legal basis for custody, visitation, etc. (and conversely, no obligation to child support). The new Vermont law, in this sense, does not seem to me at fault, since even progressive adoption advocates like myself would argue that if one wants to adopt, one should be willing to become legally married, and thus assume lifetime legal responsibility for the child. It is the marriage laws themselves that are the problem, since gay couples do not even have the option of doing this.

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