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SEE PAGE 10

OUT & ABOUT

NEWS PAPER

State rep says gays are unfit to parent

by Jerry Jones
Publisher

A Tennessee state representative said most homosexual couples are unfit to

parent, and that those couples have "numerous emotional dysfunctions and psychological issues."

State representative Debra Young Maggart, a Republican from Hendersonville, representing District 45 (part of Sumner County), made her comments in an email to Sara Dykstra, a master's student in special education at Vanderbilt's Peabody College.

Dykstra had written members of the Tennessee House Committee on Children and Family Affairs after hearing of pending legislation at a PFLAG meeting last

month. Her email asked legislators not to create legislation which would ban homosexuals from adopting or allowing them to be foster parents.

In an email response to Dykstra, Rep. Maggart wrote "I am not convinced that

continued on page 12



Maggart



Dykstra

Unfit to parent — continued from page 1

just because our foster children desperately need loving homes that we should just place them in homes that are available when research also shows that most homosexual couples have numerous emotional dysfunctions and psychological issues that may not be healthy for children."

Dykstra said she was shocked by the response received from the elected official.

"My initial reaction when I read that was both shock and anger. I was surprised to hear such one-sided, ignorant and false logic coming from someone who is elected for the common good," she said. "I do believe that Rep. Maggart honestly believes she's doing the right thing by taking this position. She really believes that there is something deviant about being homosexual."

Rep. Maggart went on to write to Dykstra that she had seen "evidence" that homosexuals could not maintain a stable relationship, and that gay couples often sought young men to adopt for, apparently, "unfretted access to subject them to a life of molestation and sexual abuse."

"We also have seen evidence that homosexual couples prey on young males and have in some instances adopted them in order to have unfretted access to subject them to a life of molestation and sexual abuse," she wrote to Dykstra. "Some of the evidence we were presented showed that lesbian and gay couples have a higher rate of breaking up than heterosexual couples as well as higher rates of promiscuity outside of their relationships."

That "evidence" was apparently presented to a legislative same-sex parenting study committee, which according to Maggart, met last summer when "we met and heard testimony from researchers on both sides of this issue."

Rep. Maggart said "the State Director, Hedy Weinburg of the ACLU and a representative from Focus on the Family," presented information at that study committee.

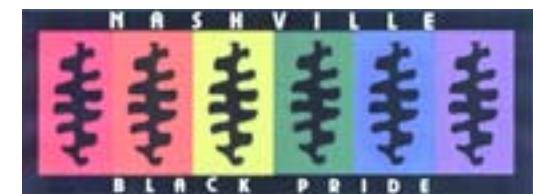
While Rep. Maggart doesn't say who "the State Director" is, she could have been referring to Linda O'Neal, executive director of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth.

O'Neal however, has told legislators that she credits gays and lesbians for adopting children who often are difficult to find homes for — teenagers, those with behavioral problems and large sibling groups.

"What children need the most is a loving home — people who are committed to them to be there through thick and thin, and there are a lot of children in Tennessee who need a home," she told The Tennessean in a Feb. 2005 article.

Tennessee Equality Project president Randy Cox said that Rep. Maggart should base her opinion on peer reviewed studies, not those that lean towards her own prejudice.

"Making generalizations about an entire



Black Pride sets date for annual celebration

group of people is blatant bigotry. There are no peer-reviewed studies to support her claims, so they are only based on her own prejudices," Cox said. "Her comments ought to be a wake up call not only for our rights but for anyone's rights who may be attacked. Our rights specifically are at risk and we need to be talking to our legislators about this issue."

Dykstra, who points out to the representative in her email that she is "not gay," said she considers herself to be a straight ally.

"Being a teacher of special education, I have learned the value of both self-advocacy and also having allies in the fight for equality. I think that in this fight for civil rights and equality, it is essential to have straight allies as well as those who are directly affected," she said. "Sometimes straight allies can relate on a different level and bring a different light to the battle."

Rep. Maggart is in her mid-40s and is single, with one child, according to her biography posted on the Tennessee Legislature Web site.

"I respect her for doing that (being a single mother) and serving our state as she does," Dykstra said.

A survey of Out & About Newspaper readers shows that more than 13 percent are raising children.

A bill to ban gay adoption failed last year. However, numerous bills affecting adoption and child visitation rights have been filed this year by many legislators who supported the gay adoption ban bills last year. Some political observers say that is a veiled attempt to ban gay adoption by amending other laws affecting parenting.

Those bills include: HB2945 - Purports to expand the definition of "biological parents" (Kelsey); HB2944 - Purports to clarify "parental rights including guardianship" for adoption (Kelsey); HB2763 - Bill extends child visitation rights to grandparents (Strader)- Filed by anti-gay adoption bill co-sponsor; bill opens State child custody and visitation law; HB2943 - Bill purports to change a definition regarding termination of rights in child custody matters (Kelsey)- Filed by anti-gay adoption bill co-sponsor; bill opens State adoption law.; SB2828 - Bill extends child visitation rights to grandparents (McCleary)- Filed by anti-gay adoption bill co-sponsor in the House; bill opens State child custody and visitation law; HB3606 - Establishes certain rights for children and spouses in certain cases of neglect (Kelsey) Filed by anti-gay adoption bill co-sponsor; bill opens State estate law.

To view the entire email exchange between Dykstra and Rep. Maggart, visit our Web site, www.outandaboutnewspaper.com. ■

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