

HOUSE PASSES BILL RESTRICTING BIRTH CERTIFICATES FOR ADOPTIONS BY UNMARRIED COUPLES

By Bill Barrow
The Times - Picayune
5/12/2009

BATON ROUGE -- Handing a victory to social conservatives, the House voted by a wide margin today to affirm that the state will not issue birth certificates listing the names of two unmarried parents who adopt a Louisiana-born child in another state.

The 77-18 vote on House Bill 60 comes amid the state's appeal of a December ruling from U.S. District Judge Jay Zainey, who sided with two California men seeking a revised birth certificate listing both of them as the fathers of the Shreveport-born toddler they adopted in a New York court in 2006. That case now awaits action by the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals.

It is not clear the bill from Rep. Jonathan Perry, R-Abbeville, can have any affect on that case, but the vote nonetheless represents a political blow to gay rights advocates and families headed by same-sex couples.

Perry said he just wants to clarify state law, which already suggests that the Office of Vital Records has discretion in responding to the adoption decrees from other states. That process routinely involves issuing new birth certificates recognizing adoptive parents. Perry's bill would clarify that any brith certificate revisions would recognize only parents who would qualify to adopt under Louisiana law. That includes single adults and married couples, but not unmarried couples, regardless of sexual orientation.

The Louisiana Family Forum and the attorney general's office asked Perry to carry the bill, he said.

Perry did not bring up gay marriage or gay adoption during his pitch on the House floor. He told his colleagues that the bill does not change who can adopt in Louisiana. But pressed by some members, he avoided answering questions about how Louisiana's policy affects the parent-child relationships of the affected families.

Critics of the bill have said parents who are not listed on the birth certificate could struggle registering their adoptive child for school or providing the child with health and life insurance benefits. Those kind of issue would be magnified, they said, if one parent died, leaving the child in the custody of the parent who is not listed on the legal document.

Rep. Juan LaFonta, D-New Orleans, who voted against the bill, said Perry's effort is about gay marriage. "I kept waiting for someone to put out there what this is really about," LaFonta said from the microphone. "We are about to make orphans out of kids."

Rep. Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe, queried Perry about his contention that the bill does not actually change the state's current practices. "If the bill does nothing, then why are we hearing it?" she said.

The bill now moves to the Senate. It has Gov. Bobby Jindal's support.

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