

# Kansas lawmakers hear debate on same-sex couples as foster parents

Senator says children have become subject of 'political correctness'

Posted: **November 17, 2015 - 1:43pm**

By **Jonathan Shorman**

[jonathan.shorman@cjonline.com](mailto:jonathan.shorman@cjonline.com)

Lawmakers on Tuesday dove into whether gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to serve as foster parents, with one senator charging that “political correctness” had entered the debate.

The Foster Care Adequacy Committee devoted part of its daylong meeting to family structures, with the discussion focusing nearly exclusively on the fitness of gays and lesbians to be foster parents.

“It’s too bad these children have become the subject of political correctness instead of looking at the scientific evidence,” said Sen. Mary Pilcher-Cook, R-Shawnee.

To examine the issue, the committee gave equal time to the Rev. Donald Paul Sullins, a professor at the Catholic University of America, and Clinton Anderson, director of the American Psychological Association’s LGBT Concerns Office — both of whom testified by phone.

Sullins argued that children who are fostered or adopted by gay and lesbian couples are more likely to suffer a host of negative outcomes — from behavioral issues to being sexually abused. He said even problematic opposite-sex couples provide a better environment for children than same-sex couples.

“Even if you compare same-sex parents to the most transient, the most problem-prone form of opposite-sex marriage, there is still a difference,” Sullins said.

This spring, same-sex marriage opponents touted Sullins’ research in the lead-up to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June, which legalized same-sex marriage across the country. However, the methodology behind that research has been criticized.

Sullins’ ties to groups opposed to same-sex marriage have come under scrutiny. Sen. Laura Kelly, D-Topeka, said Sullins has affiliations with the Family Research Council, which worked to try to stop same-sex marriage.

Sullins’ findings are at odds with those of the American Psychological Association, the largest organization of psychologists in the U.S. The APA has said a consistent body of research shows no scientific evidence that parenting effectiveness is related to sexual orientation.

“There is no credible, scientific evidence to support discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in parental rights,” Anderson said.

Pilcher-Cook slammed the American Psychological Association. She referred to criticism from an ex-official that the organization no longer bases its findings on scientific evidence.

It remains an open question how much Kansas could potentially restrict gay and lesbian parents from serving as adoptive and foster parents. DCF Secretary Phyllis Gilmore told reporters DCF currently doesn’t prevent same-sex couples from serving in any way.

Ron Nelson, a family and divorce attorney in Lenexa, said some court decisions support the contention that gay and lesbian parents seeking to foster or adopt can't be discriminated against, but that the issue hasn't been decisively settled.

"What the Supreme Court decided is that you cannot constitutionally discriminate against same-sex couples marrying. What they're dealing with is foster care — and there are a number of cases that say you can't discriminate there either, but it doesn't assume constitutional proportions," Nelson said.

Nelson predicts that at some point either the courts or Congress will resolve the issue.

The committee discussion Tuesday came after DCF said in July it had launched a review of foster care licensing. Douglas County Judge Peggy Carr Kittel at the time asked the agency whether a policy change to require foster parents to be married was under consideration after hearing what she described as "rumors."

"We are reviewing from bottom to top the entire licensure system," Gilmore said Tuesday.

Gov. Sam Brownback placed marriage front and center at the start of his second term in January. His inaugural address decried a so-called "crisis of the family" and drew a link from economic troubles to the lack of healthy families and marriages.

The lack of healthy families leads to a lack of growth in the economy, he said during the address, adding that a "big piece" of reducing childhood poverty includes strengthening marriage and family.

A House committee held hearings earlier this year on the topic of marriage, where Gilmore spoke of the challenges presented by divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing. In the wake of the June Supreme Court ruling, Brownback issued an executive order prohibiting discrimination by state government against clergy and religious organizations opposed to same-sex marriage. Some gay rights supporters believe the order could be used to keep gay people out of the foster care system.

*Jonathan Shorman can be reached at (785) 295-5619 or [jonathan.shorman@cjonline.com](mailto:jonathan.shorman@cjonline.com). Follow Jonathan on Twitter [@jshormanCJ](https://twitter.com/jshormanCJ).*

[Back to Top](#)



The Topeka Capital-Journal ©2015. All Rights Reserved.

[User Agreement and Privacy Policy](#) [About Our Ads](#) [Terms of Service](#) [Copyright Notice](#) [Contact Us](#)



CLOSE X