

July 24, 2007

Dear William,

We are writing to inform you that we have created the Vermont Commission on Family Recognition and Protection to review and evaluate Vermont's laws relating to the recognition and protection of same-sex couples and the families they form.

We have formed this commission because strong families enhance Vermont's communities, and Vermont's laws should recognize, protect, and support families. We have also concluded that the movement for civil rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans poses critical questions warranting thoughtful consideration.

A list of the commissioners and their contact information is attached. We've appointed Tom Little of Shelburne as chair.

We have asked the Commission, at a minimum, to study and evaluate the basis for Vermont's separate legal structures for recognizing and protecting same-sex couples versus heterosexual couples; the social and historical significance of the legal status of being "married" versus "joined in civil union;" and the legal and practical challenges faced by same-sex couples joined in civil union as compared to heterosexual married couples.

We expect that the Commission will obtain the input of a range of Vermonters on these questions, as well as scholars and other experts. We have asked the Commission to hold six public hearings throughout the State of Vermont for the purpose of receiving broad public input concerning these matters.

The Commission shall have the staff support of legislative council. The Commission shall complete its review, and present its recommendations for legislative or other action, to the Vermont House and Senate Committees on Judiciary on or before May 1, 2008.

Sincerely,

Gaye Symington  
Speaker of the House

Peter Shumlin  
Senate President Pro Tem