

# Group tells court lesbian parents OK

By Lauran Neergaard  
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The world's largest psychological association has weighed in on a Virginia custody case, saying sexual orientation does not affect parenting abilities and asking a state court to let a lesbian keep her son.

A Henrico County Circuit judge in September awarded custody of Tyler Doustou to his grandmother, Kay Bottoms, because his mother, Sharon Bottoms, was a lesbian.

But the American Psychological Association, in a brief filed with the Virginia Court of Appeals, argued that removing the 2-year-old boy from his mother was not in his best interest.

"Sexual orientation should not be a sole or primary factor in deciding any aspect of parental rights," the APA's Clinton Anderson

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said Friday. "Our hope is good information based on empirical research, not bias, has an impact on the court."

Kay Bottoms, 42, argued that the boy could grow up not knowing the difference between men and women if he lives with his mother and her lover, April Wade.

Sharon Bottoms, 23, testified that she was harmed by years of sexual abuse by her mother's live-in boyfriend. But Judge Buford Parsons called her an unfit mother whose "conduct is immoral." She has appealed.

But Mr. Anderson said studies

on parenting abilities of heterosexual and lesbian mothers, and on children of homosexuals compared with other children, showed "no significant differences in psychological adjustment or mental health."

In fact, the latest study on lesbian mothers shows they score significantly higher than heterosexuals on the Parent Awareness Skills Survey, which measures sensitivity to common childhood problems, the association reported.

Judge Parsons based his ruling on a 1985 Virginia Supreme Court ruling that homosexuality was

enough to render a parent unfit, but most of the research in this area has been published since that ruling, the brief said.

Joining the APA in the brief were the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the National Association of Social Workers.

The brief also cited the testimony of Dr. Rochelle L. Klinger, a psychiatrist at the Medical College of Virginia, who testified during the trial that the women were "a healthy, well-functioning couple" and disputed suggestions that a lesbian relationship might not be a good environment for the child.

The brief also said studies show taking children away from a parent with whom they are close does significant harm, while any teasing the boy might receive about his mother would do little harm.