

ADOPTION ADVOCATES
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July 20, 2009

Chief Justice Paul Rieber
Vermont Supreme Court
109 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05609

Re: Consolidation of courts

Dear Chief Justice Rieber:

I am writing this letter to you to express my severe concern about the current discussion that would move adoption cases from the current probate court situation to our family courts.

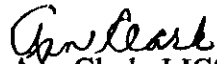
I have been an adoption professional in the state of Vermont for the past 29 years. I have been the director of the Department for Children and Families' adoption program, Vermont Children's Aid adoption program, and have been the director of Adoption Advocates for the past 12 years. Prior to my direct adoption work, I was employed in various administrative capacities for the Department for Children and Families for 18 years.

I am very familiar with Vermont's Family Court process because I have a long association with the Department for Children and Families. I have spent many days in court with families waiting for hearings in Family Courts. My direct experience is that our family courts are horribly over-worked so that nothing, unless a dire emergency, happens in a timely fashion in those courts. Time is crucial for children and our probate courts all operate in a timely, child-sensitive fashion which assures rapid permanency in loving homes for Vermont's children. Adoption cases would surely not be a priority in Family Courts because of the courts' mandate to work with child abuse and neglect cases. Thus, adoption situation would be a last priority in those courts.

We have a situation in Vermont that currently works well for adoptive families and adoption professionals. However, most important, our current situation whereby adoptions are finalized in Probate Courts assures that some of Vermont's most vulnerable little citizens are assured rapid adoption finalizations by caring and sensitive Probate judges who have clearly demonstrated that they understand the importance of permanency for children.

I urge you and your fellow and sister justices to keep adoption work in Vermont's Probate Court system where it works well and serves Vermont's citizens in a timely and professional manner. I see moving adoption work to Vermont's Family Courts as a giant step backward in our efforts to achieve permanency for children.

Sincerely,



Ann Clark, LICSW

Director, Adoption Advocates