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Curbs Imposed On Homosexuals As Foster Parents
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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, after two weeks of intense public debate, announced a new policy today that would essentially prohibit what had been possible in every state: the placement of foster children in the care of homosexuals.

In the future, said Philip W. Johnston, head of the Department of Human Services, Massachusetts will ask the sexual preference of anyone applying to be a foster parent. It will now seek to place children only "in traditional family settings," he said. "That is, with relatives, or in families with married couples, preferably with parenting experience and with time available to care for foster children."

The decision grew out of a controversy surrounding the disclosure that the state had placed two young brothers in the care of a male couple who had been candid about their homosexuality, but Gov. Michael S. Dukakis denied that the new policy discriminated against homosexuals.

'Best Interest of the Children'

"We're not talking about sexual preference here, we're talking about what's in the best interest of the children," the Governor said, adding that he meant a conventional home environment.

"I think that's what the vast majority of people in this country believe," he said. "I believe it."

Jeff Levi, acting executive director of the National Gay Task Force in Washington, said Massachusetts "is denying the fact that a gay couple can create a loving family and a loving environment for children, and that's unfortunate for the children, and for the couples who want to be parents."

Before the action today, no state inquired into the sexual preference of potential foster parents. In most other states, as here, the subject has not been a matter of public or legislative debate, and no state laws or standards barred homosexuals from being approved as foster parents, although New York has a policy prohibiting discrimination in adoptions. Exceptions to the new policy here, Mr. Johnston said, will be made only with "the express written approval of the Commissioner" of Social Services.

Review of Existing Arrangements

Existing placements will now be reviewed twice yearly with reference to sexual preference, Governor Dukakis said.

"Certainly, placements may have been made," he said. Whether children would be removed from homosexuals who now care for them would "depend on the situation," he added.

Nancy Langer of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, a homosexual rights organization based in New York, said the group would be "greatly interested in litigating a test case in this area" if the state tried to remove children already placed.

The debate here arose more than two weeks ago when The Boston Globe reported the placement of the children, 3 and almost 2 years old, with Donald Babets and David Jean, two men who had lived together for almost a decade. They wished to adopt the children and had applied to be foster parents as a first step.

Boys Removed From Home

The state removed the boys to another foster home that day, although the Department of Social Services had approved the placement with the men after a year's investigation of their home life and reputations. Mr. Babets and Mr. Jean, have said they would file an administrative appeal of the removal of the children.

But David Scodras, a Boston City Councilman who is the only elected member of the city or state governments who is openly homosexual, said today, "Disaffection is very widespread in the gay community," particularly over the language of an amendment passed Thursday by the Massachusetts House in a 112-to-28 vote.

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The amendment, to be considered by the State Senate next week, would ban the placement of foster children with homosexuals because "a homosexual preference shall be considered a threat to the psychological and physical well-being of a child."

"In effect," Mr. Scondras said, "it's saying that gay people are legally defined as child molesters. It's the most bigoted thing I've seen in my life."