Collegian Staff Writer

Mothers and fathers know planning a family is not easy. But planning a family headed by two partners of the same sex is even harder.

For many gay and lesbian parents problems arise from laws prohibiting the legal equivalent of marriage for gay and lesbian couples.

"My partner and I had a ceremony of our own and exchanged rings and vows. But our union lacks the legal reality, said Beth, a lesbian mother who requested her last name be omitted. Ironically, Beth said her life as a les-

bian mother is a reality. "Our lives are no different that anyone else's. We have a house, a dog, a cat, a child, and we pay bills, "she said. But gay and lesbian couples are constantly reminded that their unions are

not legally sanctified.

cial insemination or adopted, there are additional concerns because gay and lesbian couples are on shaky legal

ground, Beth said.

home and co-parenting of a child.

ments that state partner visitation

rights in the event of hospitalization and

account for the joint ownership of a

If a child is conceived through artifi-

The need for firm legal standing is the

most important thing, she said. "You need to be as protected as possible — that means getting a good law-

yer," Beth added. Anthony D'Augelli, associate professor of health and human development. said homosexual behavior is a felony in 24 states

Though the laws are rarely enforced, the criminalization of homosexuality puts gay and lesbian parents at a distinct disadvantage, especially in custo- D'Augelli said.

They must draft special legal docu- dy battles or adoption proceedings, D'Augelli added.

Many gay and lesbian couples would like the chance to get married but are legally unable, he said.

Because couples can't get legally married, the courts and the schools tell them they're not a stable traditional family structure, D'Augelli said.

Society in general needs to revise its view of the family, he added.

"The concept of family has to be expanded in everything — law, school and the community. The traditional family is not the only good family," D'Augelli said.

D'Augelli said society's conventions exclude certain families and make them feel like less than equal citizens.

"Anything that includes a discount for families — burial plots, movies, hotels, health clubs — should include families headed by two same sex partners,'

"We don't take children away from people who are different. Why do we take them away from gay and lesbian parents?"

> Rhonda Rivera attorney

In a speech given at the University two weeks ago, attorney Rhonda Rivera talked about legal and family issues faced by gay and lesbian people.

People often create reasons to prohibit gay people from raising children, Riv-

These reasons include fear that gay parents will molest their children, that gay parents will have gay children and that children of gay parents will face unreasonable stigmas, Rivera said.

Setting the record straight, Rivera, who is a lesbian mother, said: "I have and often invisible group in society can donors," she said.

three kids — and they're rampaging heterosexuals.

"We don't take children away from people who are different," she said. "Why do we take them away from gay and lesbian parents?

Studies have shown that the numbers of gay and lesbian parents are increasing. One-third of all lesbian women are mothers and one-fifth of all gay men are fathers, Rivera said.

The increase has caused a need for support groups, places where this new help each other face daily issues. Beth started a Lesbian Mothers

Group to offer support and socialization to lesbian women in State College last

Lesbian mothers and their children, as well as prospective lesbian mothers, are encouraged to attend the group's monthly meetings.

The group offers support for mothers dealing with family, schooling and custody issues.

More and more lesbian women are looking into means of alternative insemination in order to have children, Beth said. Currently, most lesbian mothers have had their children through previous marraiges or heterosexual

relationships. But, the tide is changing, Beth said. "I think a lot of lesbians are considering having children through artificial insemination, sperm banks and

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