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We Are Family, Gays Say

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Susan Love and Helen Cooksey were all smiles yesterday, enjoying a landmark ruling by the state's highest court that allows them to jointly adopt Love's 5-year-old daughter.

"We have all sorts of legal papers ... but this is saying we are a legal family," Love said yesterday.

Love, a doctor and nationally renowned expert on breast cancer, and Cooksey, also a doctor, said they were thrilled with the ruling, but their daughter Katie couldn't care less.

"When I found out, Katie was watching television. I tried to hug her," Cooksey said.

Katie replied, "Later," because she was busy watching cartoons, according to Cooksey.

Love and Cooksey held positions at Harvard Medical School and lived in Cambridge until last year, when they moved to California. Love formerly directed Faulkner Hospital's breast-care center. Cooksey was a surgeon at Mount Auburn Hospital.

Lesbians and gays - either partners of people who have children or couples who want to adopt - are pleased about the ruling, said Katherine Triantafillou, attorney for Love and Cooksey.

"There are hundreds of lesbians out there" who feared that they could lose their rights to children they helped raise as a member of a same-sex couple, Triantafillou said.

That fear was renewed earlier this month, Triantafillou said, when a lesbian in Virginia lost custody of her 2-year-old son after a judge ruled she was an unfit mother because of her "immoral" homosexual relationship.

Now, in Massachusetts at least, being in a same-sex relationship is not a barrier to adoption, and the standard is what is "in the best interest of the child," Triantafillou said. She added that she has at least a dozen clients, lesbians and gays, who would likely be filing soon for adoptions in the wake of the Supreme Judicial Court ruling.

Another lesbian couple in a similar case, Ellen Wade and Maureen Brodoff, both lawyers, said they were overjoyed.

"Families today don't just revolve around married people," Brodoff said.

Wade said that when they petitioned to adopt Brodoff's daughter, "we weren't allowed through the courthouse door, so to speak" because of the question of whether unmarried couples could adopt.

The SJC on Friday sent the Wade-Brodoff case back to Suffolk Probate Court for regular adoption proceedings. Wade said that with the Love-Cooksey precedent, she was optimistic she, Brodoff and Brodoff's daughter would be legally recognized as what they are - a family.