

To the Committee Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 & the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012

The purpose of this submission is to convey my personal thoughts and experiences of the current situation in relation to the Marriage Act 1961 and how the current legislation has considered me as a 'Second Class Citizen' of Australia. My world view of the current legislation as it stands is not adequate to represent my marital status and I *support the proposed changes of the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Bill 2012* to include me as an equal in the eyes of the Australian society.

I am a 42 year old Australian citizen and I have been in a 15 year same-sex relationship in Melbourne, Victoria. I am a Social Worker by profession and my partner is an educator in the TAFE sector. I have also contributed to the community as a volunteer for several years in various roles including; Fire Fighter, Community Development Worker, Counsellor and Philanthropist. As an Australian citizen who demonstrates my responsibilities in the development of Australian society, I feel I must demonstrate my right to be heard of how the current legislation of the Marriage Act 1961 has contributed to the oppression and discrimination I have experienced by certain members of political and religious organisations.

1. *Violation of my personal rights.*

I feel my basic rights as an Australian citizen has been violated as I cannot have my 15 year same-sex relationship legitimised by marriage. I am forced to register my relationship through the legislation of the Civil Union Act 2008 of Victoria. The Civil Union Act 2008 is used to demonstrate that I am NOT of equal standing to heterosexual relationships who can register for Marriage and/or a Civil Union where as I do NOT have the ability to exercise the choice. It is evident that the institution of Marriage is NOT accessible to all Australian citizens equally.

2. *Personal discrimination and stigmatisation by religious groups and political parties as 'Religious Expression'.*

As a tax paying professional person who is a non-Christian, I feel my basic rights of freedom of religious expression has been discriminated against with unsubstantiated and groundless claims by religious groups and political representatives that my same-sex 15 year relationship is dysfunctional and not wholesome to raise children. The slander of my relationship has been continuously encouraged by the recent examples of letters condemning my right for a same sex parent family by Catholic Diocese (letters sent to parishioners) and calls from the Christian Lobby Group to reject equality of same-sex couples regarding the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 and thirdly, Member of Parliament's Bob Katter's signage in Lismore, Qld, expressing a hate message of people of same-sex parent families. The examples of oppressive practice to stigmatise and isolate me as a representative of same-sex parent families, which is condoned and encouraged with the legislative restrictions of the current Marriage Act 1961 to same-sex couples.

3. *Confusion of the irony of charities recruiting Same-Sex Foster Families for children in need of family support and respite while religious groups and political parties have expressed their determination to not recognise same-sex couples (even foster parents) as equals.*

I would like to have it explained to me that although charity and welfare organisations (even Christian based charities) who work to support children have recruited same-sex foster parents where their auspice organisations will not publicly recognise same-sex parent families as equal. I understand there is a shortage of families who will foster children in their homes; however, I fail to recognise the consistency of utilising same-sex parent families as foster carers while publicly condemning their family structure.

4. *The inconsistent treatment of Same-Sex couples by Federal and State Government departments and agencies.*

Same-sex relationships have been recognised by several reforms in the entitlements and responsibilities including; Social Security, Veterans' entitlements, Employment, Taxation, Superannuation, Immigration and Workers' compensation (Neilson, 2012). My issue of concern relates to the inconsistent treatment of same-sex couples and all of their entitlements. Same-sex couples seem to maintain equality in many government departments and agencies federally and in the State of Victoria except with the definition of the Institution of Marriage. I would like to understand all of my rights and responsibilities as an 'Equal' in the Australian society. I feel the 'Institute of Marriage' should be celebrated by all Australians and not just the chosen elite.

Recommendations

My main concerns relate to my basic rights and responsibilities as an Australian citizen which are not consistent with my basic rights and responsibilities as a person in a same-sex relationship of 15 years. It is with great hope that the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 be supported to include me and my partner as equal citizens of Australia with the same rights, entitlements and responsibilities befitting to all Australian citizens.

I feel that all Australians should be equal in the eyes of the law including legislative law. The support of the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 will allow the systemic and structural safeguard to secure equality of all Australians to fit in the definition of the 'Institution of Marriage' irrelevant of their racial background, demographic background, religious or political beliefs, or their lifestyle choice living as a same-sex couple.

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute with this submission to the inquiry of the Equal Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 of expressing my views and experiences in the Australian context of marriage equality. If you have any queries or would like to follow up with any concerns, you can contact me on my email: d.ip@westvic.com.au .

Thanking you,

Daniel Ip

References

Neilson, M. A., 10 February, 2012. *Same-sex marriage_ Background note*. Commonwealth of Australia: Law and Bills Section, Parliamentary Library- Information, Analysis, Advise, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Australia retrieved by http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representative_committees?url... 28/03/2012