

To whom it may concern,

My name's Rowan, I'm a 19 year old student and have just completed my first year of my Arts/Law degree at La Trobe University in Melbourne. It's being an amazing period living in a city that prides itself on its diversity and worldliness. However, as a gay teen growing up in Geelong before moving to Melbourne to study, I encountered numerous instances of homophobia. Although lucky enough to rarely encounter random abuse or physical attacks from strangers, it was being treated differently by my closest friends, or having my deepest feelings, those that define us as humans, being dismissed as 'just a phase' by members of my own family that formed my experiences with homophobia.

It's my hope that this bill will serve as an excellent example of the Parliament's ability to drive positive changes in society. This institution already has a proud history of contributing towards ending widespread discrimination in Australian culture on gender and racial grounds. I commend the Legal and Constitutional Affairs committee for turning its attention to such an important issue and I encourage the committee to recommend this Parliament pass this bill into law before the end of its term.

This is a fantastic piece of legislation whose drafters have shown insight into the complicated forms of oppression and discrimination that confront the queer community. For example, the provisions regarding discrimination in aged care facilities will go a long way to protecting some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

The bill's definitions of 'sexual orientation and 'relationship status' are important steps towards recognizing equality through legislation. I suggest to the committee that it considers expanding the legislative recognitions to include the recent Tasmanian state legislation's definition of 'Gender Identity', which is inclusive of gender expression and presentation. Gender is more than a biological process, but is informed by culture, perceived roles and ultimately, what you personality identify as. I also recommend the committee consider the inclusion of 'Intersex' as a protected attribute, again using the Tasmanian definition, to ensure this anti-discrimination bill is as comprehensive as possible.

I would also recommend the committee investigate the merits of continuing the fund services through organisations (such as a minority of religious bodies) that choose to practice discrimination against the queer community, particularly in the aged care service industry. Whether by who they employ, or against the people they exist to provide services for, no organisation should be allowed to engage in the hurtful practice of discrimination and expect the tax payer to fund their budgets.

Finally, I ask the committee consider adding provisions for the establishment of a Gender, Identity and Sexual Orientation Commissioner to ensure a pro-active government attitude towards elimination all discrimination in this area and making Australia a safer, more welcoming environment for all of its citizens, regardless of their diversity.