

The Committee Secretary,
Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee,
P.O. Box 6100,
Parliament House,
Canberra. ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Amendments to the Marriage Bills

I am responding to the proposed (Marriage Registration Charge) Bill 2013.

I have been a Celebrant for the past nine years and when appointed it was for life. I do not agree that we should have to pay a fee annually and if by chance the fee is not paid, the celebrant would be automatically deregistered. From my understanding this is to weed out all the celebrants who are not performing their duties correctly.

I personally object to the new fee being introduced, if it means that a Celebrant who is only doing a few weddings a year is unable to pay the fee because it would disadvantage them financially, not because they are not doing a good job as a Celebrant.

If the fee is to be introduced then it should be across the board and not just civil celebrants. There are over 10,500 Civil Celebrants and from my knowledge over 23,000 Ministers of Religion or State and Territory Marriage Officers.

I am not for one minute saying they the Ministers/Priests should pay the fee personally, as they do it on a voluntary basis, but I am saying the church to which this Minister/Priest of Religion is assigned should be paying. Many years ago the churches took money only as a donation but most churches today such as the Catholic Church charge anything up to \$800.00 to perform a wedding, and so I believe this is totally discriminatory against all Civil Celebrants.

If this so called fee were going to improve our communication with the AG's Department then it would truly be a blessing but I believe that the people you have in your Marriage Department have

little knowledge of the Marriage Act 1961 and Regulations, and also believe they have little knowledge of what a Celebrant actually does.

Celebrants are now faced with:

- The cost of OPD training.
- The cost of Public & Professional Insurance.
- The cost of Copyright Insurance.
- The cost of Transport
- The cost of Association Fees
- The increased cost of Stationary from Canprint.
- The cost of setting up an office for interviews.
- The cost of using a Microphone, as it is a legal requirement to be heard.
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The fee if it is to be introduced it should be capped for at least five years and not renewed each year with another hefty fee that can of course go up to \$600.00.

My overview of this proposal is that if the fee is introduced then the AG's Department should be held accountable and the money spent should be made public to all Celebrants on a yearly basis. There would have to be a vast improvement in communication to all Celebrants as the wait time at the present moment is not acceptable.

With respect to capping of Celebrants numbers – when I first became a celebrant in 2004 you had to wait till a slot became available and it was an appointment on a regional basis.

My belief is there are so many problems because the AG's Department opened the flood gate and allowed thousands of new celebrants to be appointed. A capping should be brought back to a reasonable amount of Celebrants per year not the 100 a month that are coming through right now.

The training of these Celebrants should be looked at closely and these groups should be assessed by a professional person who is informed of the Marriage Act. 1961.

Lastly I think it is appalling that anyone should get an exemption unless through illness – to say Celebrants who live in certain postcodes will be excluded is totally ludicrous and once again discriminatory. Some of these small towns which are supposedly exempt may well get more weddings than someone who is a Celebrant on the Gold Coast.

Yours faithfully

Helen Murray