

23rd April, 2013

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please accept this letter as my submission in response to the Bill for the “Marriage (Celebrant Registration Charge) Act 2013 that is proposed.

I object strongly to the impost of a yearly Registration Fee when my appointment was a “life appointment”. I completed studies through TAFE at Yeronga, Brisbane prior to submitting my application to become appointed as a Civil Marriage Celebrant in 2004. I had to wait until 2006 before my appointment was granted. Due to changes at the time being implemented, available celebrants were so reduced that the group that was to be appointed in 2007 were appointed within a week of my own appointment and therefore did not have to wait the two years that my group did.

I reside in the suburb of Lota and when my appointment was made I was the only Civil Celebrant in my suburb. Since the removal of the “Cap” of yearly appointments this number has grown to six. Lota is a very small bayside suburb in Brisbane. The adjoining suburbs of Wynnum/Manly/Wellington Point/ Victoria Point have all seen massive growth in the numbers of Civil Celebrants since 2006. In my first year I performed 12 Civil Marriages, and was expecting the numbers to grow steadily whilst still being employed full time as a Registered Nurse. In fact the opposite has happened, with the average being between 5 and 10 per year, and to date for 2013 I have had none. The cost of being a Civil Marriage Celebrant is not viable in the current climate of oversupply of celebrants in the three areas of appointment – Religious/Government/Civil. I have made no income from providing this service to my local community and operate at a loss. My advertised fee for a wedding is \$500.00 and to encourage local bookings \$450.00. I have chosen not to travel the many kilometers to the Gold Coast or Sunshine Coast to perform weddings, as many celebrants already exist in these areas and charge fees between \$700 - \$900 for the same service. My local community cannot afford such fees.

The expenses I incur apart from the purchase of the regulated Government Forms, include:- OPD between \$150-\$180 each year
Membership to Professional Celebrant Associations - \$210.00 each year
Indemnity Insurance - \$200.00 each year
Office equipment and supplies, telephone, web page etc.
Self -promotion by advertising in the various media.

Edith Rice,
Civil Marriage Celebrant

PA System for conducting the ceremonies to large groups of people

To add the burden of a yearly Registration Fee of \$240.00 with the legislation allowing it to rise to \$600 per year over time is unfair and unjust. This situation has occurred because mistakes were made, and not by the existing celebrants prior to the “Cap” being removed, but by the Attorney-Generals’ Department.

Reading the “Bill” it states that this fee will not be an impost on Religious Celebrants or the State Government appointments, only those Commonwealth Civil Celebrants appointed under the Marriage Act 1961. The Attorney-Generals’ Department is funded by the taxpayer. I am a tax payer, so therefore see this Registration Fee as an additional Tax.

I am have no objection to the Bill’s introduction of a Fee for appointment, as I am sure this will dissuade the sector of the community that become civil celebrants so that they can “marry friends and family only”. I support qualifications that enable celebrants to be properly trained to overcome the problems created in recent times by some Registered Training Organizations.

As a Registered Nurse I have reached my “use by date” physically for such arduous work and became a Civil Celebrant for two reasons. Firstly to remain active within my local community, and secondly to have a source of income that would enable me not to become a member of the “Centre-link” club as I have always worked and been self-reliant.

My target client base will not care that you charge me a fee, but they will care if I try and pass this fee onto them. I know of some very good celebrants who have always performed their duties with honesty and integrity and provided a quality service to the community, drop out and resign their “lifetime” appointment as they could no longer afford to be a Civil Celebrant, from lack of earnings due to the rising numbers of Civil Celebrants. When I became authorized there were only 6,000 Civil Celebrants in Australia, now almost 11,000, with 55 a month still being approved in the lead up to the current deadline of qualification requirements.

Under the current Marriage Act, couples are to be given choices. I believe one of the choices of the right to choose a celebrant may be taken away from them, if NOIM’s have to be transferred because the celebrant they chose is no longer authorized due to non-payment of the registration fee. The number of Civil Marriages is no longer rising, however the number of Civil Celebrants are.

Yours faithfully,

Edith Rice

Edith Rice,
Civil Marriage Celebrant