



Paphiopedillum venustum

Gary Yong Gee

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Queensland [REDACTED]
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SUBMISSION NO. 102

AUTHORISED: 25.05.05 *[Signature]*

21 April 2005

The Secretary
The Standing Committee
on Family and Human Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members,

Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas

Last year the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs conducted an inquiry into the Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 which was never completed. Part of that Bill included changes to try to prevent assistance for inter-country adoptions by same-sex couples. The Bill was subsequently passed in an amended version which did not include those provisions.

I recently emailed your Secretary to find out if your present Inquiry covered these aspects and whether you had access to the submissions (including mine) which were made to that Committee. However, I have not received a reply and as the closing date for your submissions is looming large, I am sending this submission regardless. It is relevant not only to the discussions last year, but also to your present Inquiry, as you will see.

I am a person who has been married twice, both times for more than ten years, and have now been in a same-sex relationship for the last 15 years. It is my personal experience that there is no difference, emotionally or spiritually, between opposite-sex and same-sex relationships.

I am a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and agree with the various statements that they have made on this subject. These include:

Our life is love and peace and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another and helping one another up with a tender hand.

Isaac Pennington, 1667

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia calls for a change in the laws ... to eliminate discrimination against homosexuals. This statement is made in the light of the Society's desire to remove discrimination and persecution in the community. The Society also calls on all people to seek more knowledge and understanding of the diversity of human relationships and to affirm the worth of love in all of them.

(Quaker Australian Yearly Meeting 1975 Minute 23)

At the centre of Friends' religious experience is the consistently held belief in the equal worth of all people. Our common humanity transcends our differences. We aspire not to say or do anything or condone any statements, actions or situations which imply a lack of respect for the humanity and human rights of any person or people.

The Religious Society of Friends has always recognised that the Spirit of God dwells in every person, and we believe that this is regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

(Quaker Australian Yearly Meeting 1995 Minute 16)

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Quakers in Australia subsequently added "*committed, same-sex relationships are as valuable as other committed and loving relationships. Formal celebration of commitment between the partners in a relationship is possible when at least one person is a participant in a (Quaker) Meeting. The clerk of the Meeting will be able to discuss with couples what arrangements may be necessary for such a celebration.*"

In their previous attempt to limit overseas adoptions by same-sex couples the government was seeking to perpetuate the myth that there is something 'wrong' with same-sex relationships. This perpetuation encourages those who continue to target lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people with physical and verbal attacks. Such attacks, although mainly perpetrated by groups of young people, have a background of limiting attitudes to young people's sexuality and gender alternatives, aided by the negative comments and attitudes displayed by many community 'leaders' such as politicians, church people and others.

As a telephone counsellor with the Gay & Lesbian Welfare Association for over 15 years I have heard many examples of the damage that these attitudes can do to people of all ages. I have also been aware of the damage which lack of recognition of same-sex relationships has done, emotionally, physically, socially and financially. To perpetuate such attitudes is archaic and contrary to Australia's inclusiveness and anti-discrimination attitudes.

Intercountry adoptions

There is no evidence to indicate that raising children in same-sex relationships has any disadvantages compared to those raised in opposite-sex relationships, except for one. That is that the children may have to deal with ignorant and prejudicial attitudes resulting from adult homophobia. It has been shown that such children have equivalent emotional, social and sexual development as those raised in opposite-sex relationships, with the added advantage that they have, in general, more accepting attitudes to others. I quote some references below.

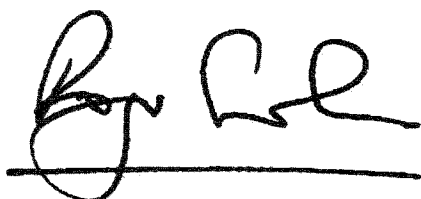
I would hope that in your present considerations you would make it quite clear that not only should overseas adoptions by same-sex couples continue but that they should receive exactly the same assistance by the government as those by opposite-sex couples.

Any other approach by your Committee would be an unwarranted discrimination on the grounds of sexuality – an issue which would be contrary to every State's anti-discrimination legislation and manifestly unreasonable.

If you are of a mind to consider the government's previous attempts I would point out that they did not seem to consider the situation where the other party to the multilateral or bilateral agreements may be willing for same-sex adoptions to take place. Has your Committee consulted with all such countries and confirmed that they wish this change to the agreements to take place?

I am happy for this submission to be made public and quoted in any way, together with my name.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Sawkins', written over a horizontal line.

Roger Sawkins

References:

American Psychological Association Public Interest Directorate. Lesbian and Gay Parenting. www.apa.org/pi/parent.html

British Medical Journal. Susan Golombok: Adoption by lesbian couples. <http://bmj.com>

European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology. J.A.M.Hunfeld, B.C.J.M.Fauser, I.D.de Beaufort and J.Passchier: Child development and quality of parenting in lesbian families: no psychosocial indications for a-priori withholding of infertility treatment. A systematic review. Human Reproduction Update, Vol.7, No.1 pp.579-590, 2001.

American Academy of Pediatrics. Technical Report: Coparent or Second-Parent Adoption by Same-Sex Parents. Pediatrics Vol 109 No.2 February 2002. www.pediatrics.org

Quaker Lesbian & Gay Fellowship Newsletter. It's Official: Lesbian couples raise well-adjusted teenagers. February 2005, page 8.

American Psychological Association Public Interest Directorate. Empirical Studies on Lesbian and Gay Parenting. www.apa.org/pi/l&gbib.html

This site contains summaries of 43 published articles.

American Psychological Association *PsycARTICLES Direct* – Search Results. <http://psycinfo.apa.org>

A search for 'gay parenting' and 'lesbian parenting' produced 12 documents.

A search for 'gay marriage' and 'lesbian marriage' produced 5 documents.

National Library of Medicine *Entrez PubMed*. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez

An initial sort produced 20 documents.