

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the provisions of the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2005

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Letter to the Senate.

Dear Senators,

On the 28th August 1963, Martin Luther King led a massive march in Washington DC and on this day he delivered his infamous 'I have a dream' speech: On this day, his speech had relevance for all Americans, but it firmly placed the spotlight on the stage of African American injustice.

In Australia, Martin Luther King's speech is as significant to Aboriginal people today as it was for all Americans in 1963. Senator's please open your hearts and your minds and listen to the message Martin Luther King delivered to his nation and relate this message to the injustice that the current Government is dealing out to our people.

You see Senator's, just like Martin Luther King all those years ago, we too have a dream.

"We have a dream that our people can break the shackles of injustice by pulling ourselves from the depths of despair of being marginalised from the mainstream of society;

We have a dream that our brothers and sisters will take the challenge of getting an education to enable our children to have a chance in life;

We have a dream that when we get our education we can compete for jobs that are currently only available to the more affluent in our society;

We have a dream that our children will further their education and make full use of the opportunities that lie outside their remote and impoverished communities;

We have a dream that one day our society can come to see us through eyes that are not blurred with the cataracts of racism and discrimination;

We have a dream that we can be lifted from the valley of disadvantage to the hilltops of equality;

We have a dream that one day we will be accepted and treated as equals in a country that once belonged to our ancestors",

Yes Senator's, we have a dream.

However, under the current proposal of the Government to cease quarantining the funding to Aboriginal independent education providers such as Tranby Aboriginal College, and to place this funding out to competitive tendering, nothing will change for our people. All we will have is a dream.

You see, Tranby Aboriginal College provides access to education for Aboriginal people from all over Australia. The courses are tailored and delivered in a way that

facilitates better learning outcomes for Aboriginal students. As such, the retention rates for students would possibly surpass those from any tertiary education facility in Australia.

In our class, we have a retention rate of 92%. When you consider the poor retention rates of Aboriginal children through the public education system, and compare them to the rates of students at Tranby Aboriginal College, the figures speak for themselves and the question must be asked, 'why can an Aboriginal College obtain such fantastic outcomes that our mainstream education system cannot?'

The answer is simple; the mainstream system simply does not understand and cater for the cultural needs of Aboriginal people, nor do they teach in a way that facilitates a better understanding of what is being taught.

In short, should a decision be made to eliminate Aboriginal independent education providers from quarantine funding, it will be a backward step taken by the Government. It will be a step that further disenfranchises Aboriginal people from society. It will ensure that our people remain external to a quality education, employment and good health.

It will ensure that our people die at an earlier age than non-Aboriginal people; that our children remain sicker and have limited life chances because they will not have the education that allows them to make a choice; and correctional facilities will continue to have an over-representation of our people inside them.

Senator's, the reason for this is simple; education is the essential building block for a life of prosperity, and it is the only way that our people can achieve equality. If further disadvantaging Aboriginal people is the dream that you share, then it is a nightmare for us.

We have a dream. It is a dream of progress, fairness and equality for our people. But only you Senator's have the power to turn our dreams into reality.

If you don't vote against this legislation, we pray that you can dream at night. For many of our people will continue to struggle as a consequence.

We trust that you will look into your souls and let the words of Martin Luther King echo deep into your conscience.

Yes Senator's, we have a dream...

Thank you.

