

Aleshia Lonsdale

Friday, 22 July 2005

To the Honourable Members of Parliament

I am writing to you as a concerned Indigenous Australian regarding the proposed Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2005.

As a student of one of the Aboriginal Colleges – namely Tranby Aboriginal College, which this legislation will adversely affect I am writing to ask Senators to oppose this Bill.

I chose Tranby Aboriginal College initially because of its reputation within the Aboriginal and wider community. My previous experiences with other tertiary education providers had left me disheartened as there was a failure on their part to recognise or respect the cultural needs of their Indigenous Students.

I completed my first Diploma at Tranby Aboriginal College in 2003 and was able to effectively implement the skills I had gained in my local community.

Not only did I gain vital skills for developing our Indigenous community, I also gained the self confidence to become involved mainstream community development, and feel that I was doing so as an equal.

I joined my local Health Council, Shire Council Cultural Planning Committee, and was selected as the Youth Representative on the NSW Premiers Advisory Committee for rural New South Wales – the RCCC (Regional Communities Consultative Committee). This experience, along with my experience in Indigenous organisations and the extensive networks I have developed both locally and regionally have enabled me to work for the benefit of my whole community – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

I am currently completing my second Diploma at Tranby in National Indigenous Legal Advocacy (NILA). This is a unique course to Tranby and was established in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

This course has again given me new skills and information which I have been able to take back to my own community and pass on.

The training I have received at Tranby Aboriginal College has benefited not only me as an individual, but also my community as a whole. I encourage other Indigenous people to access Tranby and I hope that in the future my grandchildren will be able to study there as well.

I am just one student and I know that my fellow student both past and present have achieved similar results in their own communities across Australia.

The success of students at Tranby Aboriginal College is significant. In the NILA course alone last year our retention rate was 92% which far outstrips results of other education providers.

As a student I believe this success can be attributed to the fact that Tranby recognises and respects the cultural values and needs of their students. We are receiving training which is tailored to meet the educational needs of students in a culturally appropriate and supportive learning environment.

I ask that all Senators seriously consider the ramifications of the proposed Bill and the detrimental effects it will have on Indigenous communities across Australia. To think that Indigenous people will move into TAFE and other mainstream education providers because of the proposed changes is a mistake. Indigenous people are not as successful in these places now and the result will not be to draw in more students. In fact it will mean that more Indigenous people will not access any form of further education.

I also challenge Senators to go to Tranby Aboriginal College and see first hand what truly successful education for Indigenous people is.

I believe if its not broken – don't fix it. In the case of Tranby Aboriginal College, if you have a successful model – emulate it.

Instead of losing the oldest college of this type in Australia I ask that you look at what has made it so well respected and successful and use this as a model for Indigenous education across Australia.

Thankyou

Yours in Unity

Aleshia Lonsdale.

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