

I am writing in response to the Senate Enquiry into same-sex marriage which I am thrilled to see is currently underway. I am writing to ask the Federal Government to amend the Marriage Amendment Act 2004 to remove all discrimination based on sexuality and gender and therefore allow gay same-sex couples to marry equally along with all heterosexual couples. I also ask that the Federal Government provide recognition of international same-sex marriages – including to those married couples who wed overseas prior to law reform by repealing the prohibition of the recognition of same-sex marriages entered into overseas.

My partner \_\_\_\_\_ and I have been together for six years. Apart from being two women, we are the same as many other loving couples across Australia. We have loved, made decisions, shared our lives, our finances, traveled, bought a home, faced challenges and worked through them and now our family has been graced by the arrival of our most beloved daughter \_\_\_\_\_. So in many respects we are like so many other Australian families and yet we are treated as lesser because we do not have the right to marry. We appreciate so many of the changes made recently to try and give us equality. They are wonderful. We also appreciate that Australia recognizes same-sex couples for migration which has enabled my partner \_\_\_\_\_, who is \_\_\_\_\_ American, to get Australian residency and for us to live together here. This makes the frustration of not being granted marriage equality even more poignant. It's like bringing us to the door, letting us part-way in and then stopping us, letting us see what could be and what is had by other couples, but denying us that equal right. We can't be just a little bit equal.

Both of us are humanitarian workers, working internationally for a good portion of our time in humanitarian service. Our inability to marry in either of our countries is now beginning to cause an obstacle in our life and work, especially as we work for NGOs and the United Nations (UN). The UN will now recognize same-sex couples as families and grant them equal family benefits to other married couples, but only if they are married and are residents/citizens of a country where same-sex marriage is nationally legislated. Since we currently cannot marry in either the United States or Australia this means that our family cannot be recognized, denying us the protection of family benefits such as healthcare and visas for the non-working spouse. As we are now a family with a small baby, this is worrying and we really need this to change. We believe in our hearts that Australia will change and grant us this recognition long before the United States will.

We also want to be able to marry legally to protect our family and our child. We want to be able to do so in front of family and friends knowing that it means more than just our emotional commitment, that it will give our relationship equal legal standing and recognition as other married couples.

Australia has always been a strong and proud promoter and defender of human rights and should live up to this reputation and ideal in regards to marriage as well. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Men and women...have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal right as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution". No mention is made of marriage only being between a man and woman, it is for all men and women regardless of who they love.

Same-sex couples should have the right to marry and have access to one of the most powerful symbols of inclusion, social recognition, love and commitment in our society. Allowing us to marry is also important for our children and the recognition that their families are like others and can be recognized like others. The Federal Government said that "people are entitled to respect, dignity and the opportunity to participate in society and receive the protection of the law regardless of their sexuality". This cannot go so far and stop at the front door of the marriage debate. This has to extend to marriage as well.

I urge you to open your hearts and minds to same-sex families like ours and ensure that all our rights are equal with heterosexual families, not just some, and that we can choose to marry and our children can grow up with legally married parents like most other children if that is our choosing.

Thank you

Josephine Hutton,

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