

28 August 2009

RE: INQUIRY INTO MARRIAGE EQUALITY AMENDMENT BILL 2009

This statement is written in support of amending the *Marriage Act 1961 (Cth)* to allow same-sex couples to enter into legally recognised marriages. The principle that all Australians should be treated with fairness, dignity and respect is fundamental to our diverse contemporary society. Accordingly, it is unacceptable for our government to send a message to its citizens that same-sex relationships are inferior by excluding them from marriage.

I am a young person who is same-sex attracted. Unanimously, existing academic research conducted regarding the experiences of same-sex attracted youth concludes that we experience harassment and discrimination as a result of our sexual orientations. Research also indicates that same-sex attracted youth are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to experience mental health issues, and to attempt or commit suicide. My lived experience attests to this. I have been the target of homophobic bullying, and I have experienced significant long-term depression and self-hate because of my sexual orientation. Various of my friends have been physically attacked, fired from their jobs and rejected from their families. The fundamental reason for this all these that same-sex attraction is represented deviant, abnormal and antithetical to the forms of love and family that society gives social approbation.

I submit that legislation allowing same-sex couples would act as a significant counter to homophobic prejudice. The democratic character of the Australian polity means that legislation reflects the common values of the Australian people. Allowing same-sex couples to marry would send a clear message that such relationships are as valuable as heterosexual ones. Moreover, legislation does not just confer rights and obligations, but is actively involved in shaping social attitudes and practices. The exclusion of same-sex relationships from marriage represents these unions of being of lesser value to heterosexual ones, and legitimates existing homophobic prejudice directed against same-sex attracted people.

Finally, same-sex attracted young people would grow up knowing that their government considers them to be valuable members of the Australian community, rather than deviants or misfit. I am in my early twenties now, but I cannot tell you what a difference this would have made to me as an adolescent. I submit that if the legislature was to allow same-sex marriage, the next generation of young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth would be more likely to view their sexual orientations in a positive light.

While civil unions and similar forms of relationship recognition can provide some or all of the rights associated with marriage, these alternative regimes do nothing to alter the fact that same-sex relationships are unfairly represented as inferior to heterosexual ones. For many Australians, marriage uniquely connotes the highest form of intimacy and commitment, and excluding same-sex relationships from marriage implicitly represents them as being a lesser form of love.

As a final comment, those who oppose same-sex marriage contend (whether implicitly or explicitly) that such marriages undermine heterosexual marriage and family. While such groups and individuals are entitled to their views, their position is not founded in fact or logic. There is no basis on which to conclude that recognising same-sex marriage will have any effect on heterosexuals who wish to enter into marriage. Our government should not make policy decisions based on such illogical and groundless assertions, and in the absence of very good evidence supporting a contrary position, should treat same-sex attracted Australians equally to heterosexual ones. This includes allowing same-sex attracted Australians to marry.

I thank you for your time, and hope that you will take my views into account in conducting your Inquiry.