

Dear Committee Members,

We are writing about our story as a show of support for the Marriage Equality Amendment 2009 being put before the Australian Parliament.

We are Robyn (an Australian) and (an American) in a committed loving exclusive relationship. We have been together for over 4 years now-although early in our relationship, we were forced apart repeatedly due to US visa requirements. Fortunately, the Australian government offers a 'same-sex' partner visa (we are nearing the end of the 2 year mandatory waiting period). This has enabled us to live together as a family (has a 15 year old daughter, -who considers herself as having 2 mums) in Australia since January 2007. We are very proud of our Australian law-makers who introduced 'de-facto' status for same-sex couples as of the 1st of July this year and we promptly registered with Centrelink as a de-facto couple (we were the first couple to register in). We believe that marriage equality is the next logical step in helping to take away the social stigma and bias that most same-sex couples (AND their children) face on a daily basis. Robyn also has 2 adult children who have accepted into their family unit , her 24 yr old son, often introduces us as 'this is my mum and this is my other mother' and as his step-sister. Robyn's parents, have been 100% behind us from the moment they saw us together. Anyone who is with us for more than 5 minutes knows that we are genuine in our love for and commitment to each other. Our friends and family think of us as the most 'normal' couple they know-because we truly care for each other and it's highly evident in all that we do. We hope to set an example for all of our kids as they grow in their own relationships-how to love and respect and care for their partner-regardless of who they might choose.

We knew from the moment we first met, that we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together. It has been a very difficult and trying time in our lives, but it is worth every moment that we are together. We've been through emotional turmoil through long-distance separations. We've spent thousands of dollars on plane tickets and phone calls. We've taken losses selling our home and belongings in the US-banking all that we had on a love that we have believed in from the day we met. lost many people whom she thought were friends due to religious bias when they realized that we were seriously committed to each other and meant to spend the rest of our lives together. Here in Australia, we have a working parent, a stay at home parent, we have 3 kids between us with all of their associated dramas, we pay rent and a car loan on a fortnightly basis, support one horse, one dog and two cats-we are really no different than *any* other family. Things are much different here in Australia where people are accepted on their own merits and everyone is given a fair go.

As a couple who has the total support here in Australia of family, friends and co-workers in our lives we would like to share a legal commitment (through marriage) both for us and for our loved ones. We are asked, nearly on a weekly basis, when we're going to get married, as many people don't realize that although we have been awarded de-facto status, that we are still not given the chance to marry our life partner. Many countries have now made marriage equality available to all, regardless of orientation, with no

ill-effects to the rest of their already established heterosexual marriages. Our question to the committee is this: How would our government's recognition of marriage equality and commitment to each other result in an adverse effect for the population of Australia? If we were able to marry tomorrow (and we would), would you want to divorce your husband or wife because *our* commitment has somehow diminished the sanctity of your own commitment to your spouse? We didn't choose a lifestyle, just as you didn't choose the colour of your own eyes, or your ethnic background, or how tall you would become...it is just the way we are and it seems unfair to be treated differently than those who can freely marry their opposite sex life partner. We truly believe that God blessed us when He led us together and has continued to work in our lives while we wait for legislation to catch up to our level of sincere commitment to each other.

In closing, we're not asking for preferential treatment, we're asking for the same opportunities given to ALL heterosexuals, who do not have to fight for equal rights in the form of any submissions to a committee.

Thank you for your time, patience and hopefully, your understanding of our pursuit of equal marriage rights for all in Australia.

Kind regards,

Robyn Thomas

P.S. We'd love to share a last name too-the way married couples can =)