

Dear Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

I urge you to support same-sex marriage in the current Senate Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill.

Significant progress has already been made towards equality for all sexualities with the decriminalisation of homosexuality across Australia and the recent federal law reforms. However, there are still barriers to the recognition of same-sex attraction as an equally valid and legitimate sexuality. Some states and territories offer civil unions or an equivalent, but this is not enough. Being denied the right to marry a person of one's choosing is to be denied a treasured civil right.

In 2004, with the Marriage Amendment Bill, the law was explicitly framed to exclude a group from participation in an institution which is central to our society. It is argued that access to marriage will mark a 'rite of passage' for homosexuals from second class citizens to full citizens. The current government is claiming through Centrelink advertising that 'couples are couples' but is concurrently denying them right to marry.

Granting same-sex couples the right to marry sends an important message to our society. By placing same-sex love equal with heterosexual love this implies that homophobia is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. This message is especially important to young people struggling with issues around sexuality. As a result of homophobia same-sex attracted youth experience disproportionately high rates of mental illness and suicide. 35% of same-sex attracted youth have harmed themselves through self-mutilation or attempted suicide. When discrimination is perpetrated through federal and state law, this sets a precedent for allowing discrimination and abuse at all levels, in all areas of society.

Allowing same-sex marriage will also be of great benefit to children born into this union. Currently non-biological parents have limited parental rights and recognition despite an active parenting role. Same-sex families become invisible through lack of recognition and as a result children suffer.

Equality, social justice and human rights are important for all Australians. Australia celebrates its diversity and claims to be a secular society with a divide between church and state, therefore religious arguments against same-sex attraction should not influence law. Same-sex marriage will not weaken the practice of marriage or undermine the foundations of family but will simply reflect the diversity of love existing in our society. Not all same-sex couples will get married, just as not all heterosexual couples do, but everyone deserves that choice and the ability to have their union legally recognised and publicly accepted.

Granting same-sex marriage will be instrumental in decreasing harassment, discrimination and violence against same-sex attracted people. I urge you to assist Australia in our progress towards equality.

Yours sincerely

James Cumming