

Dear Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the recognition of the bill and my opportunity to comment on it.

My family is a same sex family. We struggle with paying bills, challenging behaviour with our kids and all the usual couple things. We have been together for 8 years and have two amazing children. We live a normal life. We both work full time- me in welfare management, my partner in accounting, our son goes to school, our daughter goes to childcare three days a week, we go to church every week, my partner studies, i do art and music. Nothing unusual or untoward about this family, that suggests that we should not be recognised. We have had to work through prejudice, discrimination, judgement, and non-acceptance in our family and also by the Australian law.

As the non-biological parent I am not able to effectively access medical services, schooling, centrelink. I am on a separate medicare card, which means if my partner is at work, out or travelling and one of the children become sick I don't have access to their medicare card, putting my children at risk of harm. I don't have legal recognition as their parent and as such, if there was ever to be a relationship breakdown, or one of my children were in intensive care i would not legally have the right to see my children.

As a non-recognised partner, I also can not fulfil requests made by my partner. If she was to fall gravely ill and a decision was required to be made about her medical needs, the hospital would speak to her father. Her father is a christian minister who does not agree with our values or recognise our relationship, or my rights. As such would not even consider what we or my partner has requested e.g. not being put on life support, decisions about burial etc.

In relation to my children, if my partner was to die or become incapacitated as a parent, In a heterosexual relationship my children would come to me without any consideration. In our case, my father-in-law understands the law and would seek to gain custody of my children against their, my partner and my wishes. I do not have legal recognition as a parent. I could lose my children and my children lose me because of this lack of recognition. It would put undue costs into the court system. It would break down relationships between my children, myself and their grandfather.

I support the recognition of children with same-sex parents under the Bill. This definition acknowledges the reality of family diversity in Australia. The legal recognition of families and the equal access to entitlements is in the best interests of children.

My family should be recognised to protect my children, to protect my relationship and to protect me. I love my family and i don't ever want to be a part from them and the law in Australia will continue to hold that threat over me if this bill is not passed.

I support the Bill's inclusion of married, heterosexual and same-sex de facto couples under the straightforward and practical category of "couple relationship". Same-sex de facto couples should be treated in the same way, and with the same respect as heterosexual de facto couples.

I reject suggestions that same-sex couples should be recognised as "interdependents", along with other caring non-couple relationships. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission says that past interdependency definitions in private superannuation have failed to provide same-sex couples with real equality. Interdependency definitions do not give the clear and certain protection that de facto definitions provide. I find it morally offensive to suggest that my relationship is a matter of interdependence. Working in the welfare i understand the co-dependency as meeting a need, as opposed to a celebration of love. I would like my relationship to be recognised as a celebration of love.

I urge the Committee to commend the Bill to parliament in order that we no longer are discriminated against.

Cheers

Jannah Burgess