

January 6, 2019

**Submission re:
Sex Discrimination Amendment (Removing Discrimination Against Students) Bill 2018**

Dear committee members,

I am writing to express my support for the Bill. It will end an unnecessary loophole allowing faith-based schools to expel or punish LGBTIQ+ students on the basis of their sexuality and/or gender identity.

However, I believe the same protections need to be offered to LGBTIQ+ teachers and other staff of faith-based schools.

I attended an Anglican school from 1982-1987, the Blue Mountains Grammar School, which recently co-signed (and then removed itself from) a collective letter expressing concerns around this Bill.

My experience as a young gay person at the school was typical of LGBTIQ+ students. In the years prior to and following the decriminalisation of consensual sexual acts between men in NSW, in 1984, there was widespread homophobia among students, and explicit condemnation from some staff towards same-sex-attracted people.

I attended one church camp organised by the school at which a male staff member explicitly condemned homosexuality as being outside “God’s plan” for the students in his classroom, without any explanation other than the precepts of his faith.

The experience - and others - left me shamed about my sexuality, and contributed to me remaining closeted until I was in my late twenties.

The negative mental health impacts of LGBTIQ+ closeting are widely known, and no faith-based school in Australia should require the right to discipline students or staff on the basis of their sexuality and/or gender identity.

The Blue Mountains Grammar School remains unclear about its approach to LGBTIQ+ students and staff, and others in the wider school community. The adoption of this bill will give clarity and send a strong message to all Australians of faith: that no citizen or person in Australia’s care warrants discrimination on the basis of our sexual orientation or gender identity.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Burge