

I write to offer my support for the *Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012*, which I understand is currently being reviewed by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal & Constitutional Affairs.

In recent years, the Senate has expressed its position on the general issue of equality and respect for same-sex attracted people by amending numerous bills, in 2008 as I recall, to ensure that we have the same rights as other Australians. This was a landmark, progressive move that has benefited many, many thousands of Australians.

The case for protecting same-sex attracted, transsexual and intersex Australians from discrimination is essentially the case that the Senate accepted several years ago. It is:

- all Australians deserve to be treated equally, as a matter of principle and consistent with our international obligations
- there is no logical, evidence-based reason for discriminating against particular groups of Australians; legal discrimination is invariably a hangover from less-enlightened times
- clear signals about equality and antidiscrimination have practical, beneficial effects (such as a reduction in youth suicide, less alcohol and other drug misuse, and stronger and more supportive relationships)

The case for continued discrimination is the same mishmash of unevidenced, prejudiced bigotry that the Senate has rejected on many previous occasions. It constitutes wild claims of disastrous consequences that continue to fail to materialise (except perhaps in the minds of their proponents), and claims for special status based on their proponents' enjoyment of the act of discrimination: on the psychological comfort it gives them, regardless of the pain and suffering it causes their victims.

I see that some people are advocating continued discrimination against LGBTI people in aged care facilities, claiming it could be embarrassing and awkward for other residents.

My mother is in a nursing home. When I visit her with my partner, we do as we usually do: we hold hands, and express affection towards each other as appropriate to the occasion. The staff know of our relationship, as do a number of my mother's friends. There is no sense of embarrassment or awkwardness, and why should there be? If there were gay residents of her nursing home, why should they not be free to also express affection towards those they love? If there were staff, or residents, who are upset by the notion of compassion and love free of gender considerations, why should their sensibilities be supported by the state rather than my right to engage in behaviour which is lawful?

Above all, what is the case for LGBTI people continuing to have to do the hard yards for equality while the state turns a blind eye to those who persecute them? Because discrimination is one of the few avenues left for bigoted, prejudiced people to persecute those with whom they feel uncomfortable.

I hope you have the opportunity to hear from some transgender and intersex people: many of them have very tough lives and deserve protection as they go about following a path that can be painful and even fraught with danger.

Finally, I hope that you send a clear signal that it is time for the various religious franchises to comply with the basic notions of equality and respect that prevail in Australia today, particularly as their business models rely so heavily on government funding. There is a rising feeling of disgust amongst Australians that many of these franchises have abuse as their modus operandi; that they see themselves above the law; and that something must be done about it. These franchises seem to have a good side

and a bad side, and the good side can never justify the bad side. To accept their bizarre claim that they alone must be free to discriminate is to stand on the wrong side of history.

I wish you the best in your deliberations.

Regards

Ron Thiele