

21 December 2012.

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
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Dear Secretary,

Thank you for accepting my submission to your inquiry.

I support the Exposure Draft of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012.

I commend this legislation as a means to extend human rights protections for some of Australia's most vulnerable people against forms of discrimination and bullying which are currently perpetrated by more empowered but less enlightened members of our society. I consider bullying and discrimination to be two equivalent manifestations of the same wrongdoing which this legislation hopes to identify and address in passages such as Clause 19.

I welcome the proposal in Clause 124 that bullies will be held accountable more so than under previous legislation, as my experience demonstrates that previous protections have been inadequate.

- I have personally experienced discrimination from religious individuals and one religious organisation, and I observe that they have been effectively accountable to no one.

I was a school teacher for 25 years, and during that time I observed many other examples of bullying and discrimination which I hope this legislation will address, including:

- I have known/met gay and lesbian school teachers – in both State and private schools – who felt compelled to hide their private lives for fear of bullying or dismissal.
- I have known/met students who were bullied because of their real or presumed sexual orientation.
- I have observed a reluctance by some teachers to confront bullying or to examine controversial topics due to a fear of possible complaints from parents, often religious parents.
- I have known one private school to print an AIDS joke in its school magazine while some other private schools have arguably endorsed homophobia within their religious philosophies.

I see an urgent need for public education about entrenched inequality and social injustice, and I see this legislation as providing one such important educational opportunity whilst also protecting vulnerable people from human rights abuses.

I therefore make the following requests to this inquiry:

- **I ask the Australian Parliament to immediately enact this legislation in order to censure bullies and to educate those in our society who fail to understand the need for protection for “minority groups”.**
- **I ask that religious people, schools and organisations not be allowed to bully or discriminate against others under the pretence of religious freedom.**
- **I ask that sexual orientation, relationship status and gender identity be protected.**
- **I ask that the legislation also provides equal protection for other potential victims of discrimination and bullying, including atheists, agnostics, bisexuals, intersex and transgendered people, refugees and asylum seekers, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and sex workers.**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.