

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
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Submission for the Inquiry into the Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws—General Law Reform) Bill 2008

Dear Committee Secretary

I strongly support the Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws—General Law Reform) Bill 2008. Regarding this Bill, I draw the Committee's attention to the following points.

1. Interdependent relationships should not be included in this particular Bill. Removing discrimination against same-sex couples in federal law has been investigated by several inquiries and widely debated in the community. In contrast, the legal recognition of interdependent relationship raises a number of social, legal and financial issues which have not been subject to public debate. Interdependent relationships should be recognised separately and only after thorough consultation and consideration.
2. State and territory registered civil partnerships should be given equal recognition. In this Bill, partners in state or territory registered civil partnerships are recognised as a type of de facto partner. This is inappropriate because partners who register a relationship choose to no longer be considered a de facto couple. We urge registered civil partnerships to be recognised in their own right as a separate category of relationship, alongside married and de facto relationships.
3. Children in families headed by same-sex couples must be protected equally. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, together with your Committee, has recommended the recognition of non-biological parents in same-sex relationships across federal law, including in areas such as family law and child support. I support this recommendation.
4. The Government has created a new term, "relationship parent", to describe non-biological same-sex parents in the areas of social security and taxation. Without the changes in point 3, this implies that a non-biological parent in a same-sex relationship is different or less than the non-biological parent in an opposite sex relationship. It is in the best interests of the child that both of their same-sex parents are recognised equally before the law.
5. The changes to federal law proposed in this Bill impose a raft of new rights and responsibilities on same-sex couples. In order for same-sex couples and their families, NGOs, service providers, professionals, and government agencies to be adequately prepared for these changes, it is important for an extensive education campaign to be prepared and implemented by the Federal Government.

Yours sincerely