



PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS

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***PFLAG Submission into the Human Rights and
Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012***

I am presenting this Submission as the National Spokesperson for parents with lesbian daughters and gay sons.

The Federal Government's anti discrimination laws need to be simplified in order that all Australians can easily access their rights when they feel they have been discriminated against or vilified.

The new legislation must address discrimination and vilification on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Discrimination and vilification of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people (LGBTI) can be insidious or blatant depending on the environment. It can cause people to remain in the closet for fear of back lash. It can and does cause depression and suicide for those in the LGBTI community who feel trapped and helpless against any form of proper recourse.

LGBTI people don't commit suicide just because they are LGBTI, it's because of the fear of hatred, ostracism and discrimination that may be or is directed at them.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) nationally, is calling for this new Anti-Discrimination Bill to no longer permit any person or organisation to incite hatred, ostracism or discrimination of any kind against any person with differing sexual orientation or gender diversity by using the church or religion as protection. Tasmania doesn't allow exemptions for religious groups to discriminate against the LGBTI community in any way and there is no reason why that should not apply in the other States and Territories of Australia.

All aspects of the new legislation should apply nationally, to have uniformity between States. All too often legislation applying to those in the LGBTI community is not consistent between States and this is an opportunity to address that.

Furthermore, the new Bill must apply in all social settings, schools (religious or State) and the work place.

As the mother of a gay male and as someone who actively provides support for the LGBTI community I hear of many who feel/and are discriminated against just because of their sexual orientation or gender. This issue does not impact on the rights of others but is hurtful and unnecessary for the individual concerned, may impact on their self esteem and place in society and can result in more serious consequences of self harm or suicide.

Example One: A non biological mother in a same-sex relationship took their daughter (14years old) for her vaccinations with a letter from the biological mother, but the girl was refused vaccination, because the biological mother was not present.

Example Two: A young person I know has a partner who remains closeted in the workplace because he works at a religious school. The partner is extremely fearful that if he is “outed” he will be made redundant. This puts extreme pressure on the relationship because the young man, who is out to the world, doesn’t want to live his life in the closet. But this is happening, just because his partner who he loves is fearful of losing his job as a teacher in the school where he enjoys working.

This will bring great heart ache for both if the relationship ends. The teacher works twice as hard as other teachers to prove himself, takes on extra workload and duties to be respected at the school and to be seen as worthy. This is a typical issue that causes depression, substance abuse and low self esteem. No heterosexual person would have to do this to feel worthy.

Example Three: A male teacher from a Sydney religious school was called into the Principals office and told to keep his sexual orientation quiet, because if the Bishop found out he would be sacked. The teacher resigned because he felt his sexual orientation was already an issue with the school and didn’t want to be fearful of being found out, regarding him being homosexual.

Example 4: Even with sporting teams there is a problem. A young man I know tried to join rugby union teams in Sydney, but when it became known he was gay, he was never picked for teams. He eventually joined the Convicts, a gay rugby union team where some players are straight. The Convicts don’t discriminate.

Example 5: A young police officer applied for a rural position and felt that he had the promotion he was seeking, until the interviewer asked if he was taking his partner with him. When the young man answered “yes” there was a long silence on the phone and he didn’t receive the promotion.

However, a few years later this same young man was in a different police team and was promoted. During his 10 years in the police force he received bravery awards and was well respected by his workmates for his work ethic and detail to his work.

This young man’s early treatment in his workplace has led him to be very wary when applying for work. He never lets it be known he is gay because he feels if the interviewer is aware, he:

- May not get the job
- May be passed over for promotion
- May be isolated in his work environment
- May be treated differently to others in the workplace
- And if he makes a mistake, it will be considered that it occurred because he is gay and this may be seen as an impediment.

As a parent, I am always concerned when my son changes his employment because of the above mentioned concerns. I also encourage him to stay with the present employer, when I know he is accepted for who he is and that he is “a lovely, competent, caring gay man” who, like many LGBTI work extremely hard, to be seen as worthy members of their workplace and society in general. My son once told me he feels he has to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good.

My straight son would never feel this way. This is an issue that our heterosexual children need never be concerned about. The heterosexual orientation doesn’t automatically make us more competent, intelligent or brave.

There are at least hundreds of thousands of parents like me with similar concerns and fears about our children in the workplace and the community generally because of discrimination and vilification.

Vilification: this is an area that most certainly needs to be addressed. Free speech is fine, but not at the expense of another person or group’s physical and emotional well being.

Issue One: The lesbian and gay community are harassed and called names from moving vehicles on a very regular basis. I have witnessed this on several occasions as I have walked with LGBTI friends; to see the shame and hurt in their eyes is heartbreaking. The problem is that LGBTI people may already suffer their own internalised homophobia and public name calling only confirms their worst fears.

The new legislation must address this. As heterosexuals we could not imagine have insults hurled at us, just because we are straight.

Issue Two: We often hear or read that gay men have no morals, are perverts, deviants, paedophiles, the devil's agents and the list goes on. This is no more true of gay men than it is of heterosexual men. But little is done to prevent the comments from being printed or the perpetrators being called to account in a serious manner in the media or courts.

If such comments were made about those who make these out dated wild accusations there would be a hue and cry. Free speech is a right to be cherished in a democratic country but it should not be a licence to insult or incite hatred.

My final and clear message to the Senate Committee is that Australian society no longer condones discrimination against indigenous, women or migrants or calling them inappropriate names. The new Anti-Discrimination Bill must ensure that all people who identify as LGBTI have the same human rights.

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