

HISTORICAL HOMOSEXUAL CONVICTIONS EXPUNGEMENT BILL 2017

Second Reading

Resumed from 23 November.

MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont) [3.58 pm]: I rise today to make a contribution to the Historical Homosexual Convictions Expungement Bill 2017. I am immensely proud of the Premier and the Attorney General for bringing this bill to state Parliament and I wish to congratulate them on this most important and deeply symbolic legislation. This signifies Labor's commitment to righting a historical wrong that saw horrendous state-sanctioned discrimination and persecution towards gay men that should never have occurred. Such laws acted to shame gay men simply for being gay. They were designed to humiliate and denigrate. These laws not only caused immense emotional grief and pain for the victims, but also prevented those who were unjustly convicted from gaining certain employment and from travelling due to their criminal records. They were robbed of their human rights. This is, indeed, a dark chapter in Western Australia's history.

This bill establishes a framework whereby an eligible person, or, in the instance in which the person has died, the person's relatives, partner or guardian, can apply for expungement of historical homosexual convictions relating to consensual acts. This bill may affect only a relatively small number of Western Australians. However, these convictions have had ruinous consequences and detrimental and long-lasting effects on the lives of those who have been convicted unjustly. In fact, it is almost unbelievable to think that such laws existed. It was only in 1990 that homosexuality was decriminalised. For decades, unjust laws have allowed for the open discrimination of gay men, perpetuating prejudice and bigotry, publicly shaming them for their sexuality, and stripping them of their dignity, thus allowing the hatred to be tolerated and accepted. This sent a clear message to members of the gay community that they are not considered equal in the eyes of the law. This is clearly wrong.

This bill is long overdue. I wish to state for the record that I am deeply saddened about these past wrongs. I am sorry. It should never have happened.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.