

4th January 2016

Hon Simon O'Brien
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
GPO Box A11
Perth WA 6837

To the Chair and Members

Petition 107 - Religious Schools Discrimination

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to Petition 107 that my friend Beth Cole and I started in late October 2015. Our issue has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

I strongly believe that the blanket exemption in section 73 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA) ("EOA") that allows religious schools to discriminate on the basis of sexuality and gender history, should be removed.

I agree with Beth Cole's submission, put forward on 3rd January 2016. Religious schools that receive public funding must be held to the same non-discriminatory standards as other schools, as outlined in the *EOA*.

My partner, Michelle, and I have been blessed to have a child, and our second child is due to be born in March this year. As a mother, it deeply concerns me that a child could face such blatant prejudice in an environment that is meant to be safe and inclusive of all family structures. Additionally, that this prejudice is sanctioned and supported by the law is shocking in this day and age. It directly affects my children and is highly distressing.

As parents in a same-sex relationship my partner and I feel privileged to have the confidence to speak out publicly and take a stand against this form of discrimination towards ours and other children. However we are aware many of our friends who are also in same sex relationships and are parents feel as strongly about this issue, but do not have the confidence to challenge this discrimination so publicly. They fear further homophobic persecution towards their children and themselves should they take a similar stand.

This highlights the insidious nature of the blanket exemption in section 73 of the EOA, which enables prejudice and perpetuates discrimination towards families like ours.

I feel I cannot remain silent about this issue when my children's educational opportunities and sense of safety are at stake, and where the fabric of my children's family (indeed family comprises a young child's world) are threatened.

I urge the Chair and Members to remove the exemption that religious schools currently have by completely removing section 73. This exemption has no place in an Australian society where diversity is valued.

Yours Sincerely

Karen Gilgallon