



Hansard of the NSW Legislative Council

MISCELLANEOUS ACTS AMENDMENT (SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS) BILL 2008

2nd Reading Speech 3 June 2008

The Miscellaneous Acts Amendment (Same Sex Relationships) Bill 2008 seeks to remove acts of discrimination against same-sex couples in parenting and raising children. The Greens support the bill, recognising that it is based on two basic facts. The first is that a quality loving relationship is not limited to people of different genders. The second is that a loving supportive environment for children can be and in many cases is provided by parents of the same gender. The introduction of this bill in Parliament is a tribute to the campaign for full equality for lesbians, bisexuals, gays, transgender and intersex people, which they have conducted over many years and the campaigns they also have conducted for the rights of children.

More importantly, this legislation is a measure of the maturity of the people of New South Wales who have begun finally, in growing numbers, to escape the shackles of prejudice. I cannot in any substantial way add to the contributions of other members who have spoken in support of this bill. I just pay tribute tonight to the Hon. Penny Sharpe and the Hon. Helen Westwood, who have not only given us solid and intelligent reasons to support this bill but have also had the courage to share with us their own personal experiences. I also pay tribute to my colleague Lee Rhiannon, the Hon. Robyn Parker, the Hon. Trevor Khan, the Hon. Catherine Cusack and the Hon. Melinda Pavey who have given us passionate support from a human rights perspective and ample evidence for that support.

In my own life, I have been delighted to watch children grow up as happy, healthy, well-adjusted kids with two female parents, and many members in this Chamber have shared an equal delight. But it is not just about our personal experiences; there is hardcore evidence to support the proposition that children who are raised by two parents of the same gender are in no way disadvantaged. I bring to the attention of the House the 2002 fact sheet on the Evidence of Outcomes for Children of Lesbian Parents, which was endorsed by the Victorian Attorney General's Advisory Committee on Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues. That fact sheet stated:

Over the last two decades increasingly complex investigations have consistently shown:

1. that lesbian parents and their children are as emotionally and socially well-adjusted as their heterosexual peers
2. children have similar gender-identity development and gender role behaviour
3. sexual orientation of the children shows the same distribution as the population – I would insert there, "Who cares?" –
4. personal development such as intelligence, basic personality, self-esteem and moral judgment are no different
5. social relationships with peers and adults of either sex are no different
6. relationships with parents are no different

That is to say that the Attorney General's department in Victoria, based on an extensive study of the literature, came to the inescapable conclusion that the genders of one's parents will not determine outcomes. The Federal Parliamentary Library Research Service concluded, from an extensive literature review, that:

the existing evidence indicates that the sexual orientation of parents does not appear to be a determinant of the success of a child's development. Nor does the presence of a father appear crucial for normal development

That is to say, two independent and unbiased observers of the scientific evidence came to exactly the same conclusion that the gender mix of the parents has no impact on the child.

I turn briefly to the opposition to this bill. There has been some rather loose use of statistics in this Chamber this evening. In particular, one member tried to equate what he referred to as broken families with families where both parents have the same gender. Of course, broken families include all nature of dysfunctional families and all nature of situations that would adversely affect children. But if one excludes all those types of families and includes only the same-sex families—and I totally reject the idea that same-sex families are in any way broken—then the evidence runs counter to that.

It seems to me that the arguments centre on the idea that the legislation somehow or other undermines the role of fathers in the community and with it the integrity of the so-called family unit. I cannot accept the argument that heterosexual families are in any way damaged by the recognition of same-sex relationships. Those sorts of contributions we have heard tonight raise the question: Is heterosexuality so fragile and is it so lacking in self-confidence that a diversity of relationships would somehow or other destabilise it? The Greens think not. I commend the bill to the House.