



WOMEN'S REFUGE

NATIONAL COLLECTIVE OF INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S REFUGES INC.
Ngā Whare Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa
Level 2, 57-59 Courtenay Place, PO Box 19-293, Wellington 6149
Phone 04 802 5078 Fax 04 802 5079 Email info@refuge.org.nz
www.womensrefuge.org.nz

6 November 2012

Chair
Government Administration Committee
Parliament
Wellington

RE: Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill 2012

Please accept this submission from the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges on the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill 2012. Thank you for the opportunity to make a late submission.

Our organisation is in favour of the Bill. It is timely and appropriate for New Zealand as a modern and diverse society to be considering the issue of marriage.

We support changing the definition of marriage so it is not limited by sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Passing this bill will eliminate discrimination in regards to marriage, and promote equality, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex New Zealanders. We note that passing this bill will do nothing to the notion that marriage is a life long commitment between loving couples.

An inclusive society

We support this bill because we want a New Zealand which is a diverse and inclusive society, where everyone, regardless of their sex, gender identity and sexual orientation is protected from discrimination and has the same opportunities and rights.

Discrimination

We note that many international human rights instruments affirm a state's obligation to protect its citizens from discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The current wording of the Marriage Act discriminates against same sex couples and their families. By being unable to marry, same sex couples are also denied the benefits and protection measures afforded to 'married' couples (e.g. the right to adopt).

Marriage is an institution with cultural, historical and social significance. We believe there is merit in the argument that this significance is not fully captured by civil unions. This is unfair and discriminatory.

For many, marriage is seen as the most valued form of relationship. It is not acceptable therefore that the right to marry be denied for some New Zealand Couples on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Families

Marriage is a reason to celebrate love and it is an occasion of joy for families. No family in New Zealand should be deprived the joy of seeing their loved ones make a commitment that is recognised by everyone.

Extending the definition of marriage will give more New Zealanders the right to access the cultural, social and legal benefits of marriage. We believe this will strengthen families.

Another issue to consider is the issue that teenagers who are attracted to the same sex have five times the attempted suicide rate as their heterosexual peers. These attempts relate to their experiences of discrimination. Changing the law will go some way to legitimising their choices and sending the message that all New Zealanders are equal and all couples are equal.

Religious Debate

New Zealand is a secular country and marriage in New Zealand is a secular institution. We do not believe that extending the definition of who can marry will impact on religious practice or beliefs in any way. Religious belief is not currently a reason to prevent marriage and this will not change. We note that the bill does not affect the definitions or processes that the different churches have developed around marriage.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather Henare', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Henare
Chief Executive