



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

LGBTI Australians

SPEECH

Thursday, 13 February 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 13 February 2014
Page 479
Questioner
Speaker Entsch, Warren, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (12:34): I rise here today wearing a very, very different hat—not as the member for Leichhardt but as the chair of the Parliamentary Friendship Group for LGBTI Australians. On Friday a report was released which, to be frank, sent a pang of great sympathy and sadness through me. Titled *Growing up queer*, it examines the mental health of young people who are growing up in today's society as gender variant or sexually diverse. What do these terms mean? 'Gender variance' refers to expressions of gender that do not match that predicted by one's sex, including people who identify as transgender, transsexual, gender-queer or intersex. 'Sexually diverse' is a broad term used to include people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer or pan-sexual, who are questioning their sexuality.

More than 1,000 young people aged between 16 and 27 years of age recently participated in a national research study, and I congratulate Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, with partners the University of Western Sydney and Twenty10, for undertaking this project. The results, not surprisingly, were very sobering. Almost two-thirds of respondents reported homophobic or transphobic harassment or violence across different aspects of their lives, including in schools, families, the workplace, the streets and other public sites, including sporting events. As a result, 16 per cent of the young people had attempted suicide, and 33 per cent had harmed themselves. This harassment, bullying and violence has a serious impact on many young people's educational experiences, with some changing schools multiple times and others dropping out of school altogether. Most disturbingly, while peers were the most frequent source of homophobia and transphobia, it was the harassment by some teachers that had the most profound impact.

Further, sex education in schools does not respond to the needs or experiences of young LGBTIQ people, exposing them to a range of social and health risks. Rejection by families can lead to homelessness, economic instability and destitution for some young people. Participants reported negative experiences in dealing with government services and human welfare agencies. Given that many of them had moved out of their homes before they turned 18, they were reliant on these services for accessing income support and housing, but negative staff attitudes presented yet another challenge. In the workplace, many transgender people said they found it particularly difficult to find work. A big issue was the discrepancy between birth names and chosen names on employment forms, and unsuccessful attempts to find work because of attitudes from employers. I know there are a number of community organisations that provide support and guidance for young people identifying as LGBTIQ. However, I agree with Young and Well CEO, Associate Professor Jane Burns, when she says that much more is needed to be done by way of education and training so that this dire impact on mental health and wellbeing of these young people can be eliminated.

As the chair of the Parliamentary Friendship Group for LGBTI Australians, I can say that we are absolutely committed to helping combat discrimination against our fellow Australians. The friendship group is an all-party group that I proudly chair, with very capable co-chairing by Graham Perrett—the member for Moreton, from the Labor Party—and Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, the Greens senator from South Australia. At present we have 27 members, and there is a particular focus on how, as a government, we can address legislative, regulatory and institutional discrimination.

I note that the report recommends that the current exemption of private schools from the anti-discrimination legislation relating to sexuality needs to be repealed, so these young people can have the same rights as their peers in government schools. It also clearly demonstrates the need for greater community education and training of educators, doctors and health professionals.

I invite all LGBTI-relevant organisations to register with my office to stay informed about the LGBTI friendship group's activities during the 44th Parliament, and I also invite them to please come along to us with any ways in which we can help to improve these young people's experiences in education and employment and in accessing government services. We cannot allow this persecution to continue impacting on the lives of so many young and vulnerable Australians.