



4<sup>th</sup> November 2011

Research Director  
Legal Affairs, Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000  
Email - [lapcsesc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:lapcsesc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Reference: Civil Partnership Bill 2011

Dear Research Director,

We appreciate the opportunity to submit our organisations views to the Committee regarding the Civil Partnership Bill presented to parliament on the 25<sup>th</sup> October by the Hon. AP Fraser.

Respect Inc is a peer based sex workers' organisation funded by Queensland Health to provide peer education services to sex workers. Respect Inc has been delivering information, education, advocacy and support services to sex workers from offices in Cairns, Townsville, Gold Coast and Brisbane since January 2010.

The views of Respect Inc are not influenced by commercial competition nor are they based on financial concerns; our focus is solely on sex workers' health, safety and civil rights. We are a part of the wider community and so share an interest in ensuring quality of life and health and safety for local communities.

Within the diversity of the sex worker community, there is a diverse range of sexualities, gender identities and views regarding relationships. In general, Respect supports people in their business practices rather than their personal lifestyle decisions. However, many of our members have encouraged us to write our organisations views regarding their rights to choice in their personal relationship decisions regardless of sexuality or gender.

#### The Role of a Sex Worker within our Community

Sex workers are a very diverse group of people with various levels of qualifications and experiences from a range of other industries. If a sex worker has skills in counseling, they often attract clients that want this form of communication as a part of the sexual services. We have found that due to the anonymity of the sex industry and the service users, people have opportunities to be more honest with their feelings and experiences.

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Sex workers often have clients that disclose information about themselves that they may never say to their doctors, friends, family or support service. Health concerns including sexual health, emotional wellbeing and other concerns including relationship problems and a fear of disclosure of sexuality may be disclosed and sex workers have a diverse range of communication skills that can be used to assist their clients in identifying their concerns and desired outcomes.

Many male to male sex workers provide sexual services to clients that are presenting within the community as heterosexual men. These men are difficult to target by health services to provide information and education programs to prevent and respond to sexual health, suicide prevention, violence within relationships, etc

Fortunately, many sex workers are skilled communicators and are often accessing medical services for their own sexual health needs and can make referrals to services such as the Sexual Health Services when appropriate. However, we believe that if society was more accepting of same sex relationships, the need for people to hide their sexuality would be reduced.

### Homophobic Violence

The basic principal of sexual service provision is no different to any other industry, supply and demand. While there is a demand for sexual services to be provided by women, men and transgender people, by clients who want heterosexual, homosexual and fantasy services, there will be industry consisting of people with diverse genders and sexualities providing the services.

Homophobic violence perpetrated in Queensland has been researched and evidence including 'Mapping Homophobia in Australia' produced by The Australia Institute for a Just, Sustainable, Peaceful Future Ltd reports Queensland as one of the two most homophobic states in Australia.

Respect responds to violence perpetrated against sex workers. Within this, there has been sharing of stories of homophobic violence perpetrated towards some of us. We believe that if society more openly accepted same sex attraction and relationships and that people are not doing behavior which is causing harm to others, homophobic violence will reduce.

### Self harm and Suicide

Respect Inc works collaboratively with various support services that respond to issues that are beyond that of sex work including mental health services. Although, we do not believe

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that sexuality and gender identity are a cause of emotional health issues, issues such as discrimination, homophobic attitudes and social isolation can lead to self harm behaviors.

Respect believes that our society and community needs to change attitudes to provide for a more supportive environment for people to be honest with themselves and the wider community about their sexuality and gender identity.

Although, we acknowledge that the Civil Relationships Bill is only one aspect of the social policies that will need to be altered to suit a more inclusive community for GLBT people, Respect believes that this is a step in the right direction.

Respect Inc supports the Civil Partnerships Bill and the changes to social policies to include the rights of same sex couples civil unions to be recognised in Queensland.

Yours truly,  
Management Committee  
Respect Inc

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