




Speech By
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Record of Proceedings, 3 December 2015

**RELATIONSHIPS (CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS) AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (12.11 pm): I rise proudly to support this bill. The main purpose of the bill is to fulfil our government's election commitment to provide couples of any gender with the equal choice of having an official civil partnership ceremony prior to having their relationship registered. I remember when this issue was debated back on 30 November 2011 and the glee that the LGBTIQ community had when it was finally passed in this House. It was a proud moment for me. The Queensland government at the time did all it could to pass laws registering civil partnerships. However, unfortunately a bill was debated on 20 June 2012 and was passed the very next day—at about 12.30 am, from reading *Hansard*—that stripped away the rights to a state-sanctioned ceremony, changing the title of the act from 'civil partnerships' to 'registered partnerships' in an effort to remove any entitlements seen to be, in the words of the member for Mansfield, mimicking marriage. These actions, which caused significant hurt to the LGBTIQ community, are best described by a witness to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, Alistair Lawrie. He stated—

The decision to abolish civil partnership ceremonies, and the haste with which it was achieved, was an unjustified, divisive and mean-spirited act—and I commend the current Queensland Government for taking steps to undo the damage that was done three years ago.

I add that I may never have been able to quote this witness due to the unorthodox and exclusionary position of the non-government members opposite who would not support such evidence being part of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee final report on the bill. I commend the government members for the statement of reservation and for providing the evidence they received from the community, which included personal narratives, and recognised the time and energy these witnesses put into their valuable submissions and evidence.

Ceremony and the right to hold one is important. Rituals are also important and so is the right to participate if one chooses. This is best summed up by the Very Reverend Dr Peter Catt from the Anglican Church when he said to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee—

A ritual is the event that gives the feel of reality to an event. For example, at St John's Cathedral we have a burial register in which we record a person's death, but it is the funeral—the ritual—which helps people to grieve and move through the grief process. ... This bill, through the reintroduction of ceremonies, offers the opportunity for social recognition for those to whom such a ritual will reflect the depth of their commitment.

I do not think I could have said it better. I also quote Mr Stephen Page on behalf of the Australian Lawyers Alliance. He stated—

The ability to merely fill out a form without any public celebration of their love is short changing these couples in having that love celebrated with their friends and family, and, if they are religious, with God.

...

The key to the 2012 amendments was to deny that public celebration of love.

I believe no government has a right to take that away from citizens in this state.

Language, ceremony and recognition are important. If you do not agree, tell those from the LGBTIQ community who are in the gallery today and who were affected by the previous government's laws. I go on again to quote the Very Reverend Peter Catt where he puts it so eloquently. He stated—

Language is humanity's most powerful tool and weapon, hence the saying "the pen is mightier than the sword". The change in language that was introduced by the 2012 bill, altering partnership to relationship, caused a lot of hurt.

I agree with him entirely.

I recognise the members from the LGBTIQ community who are in the gallery this afternoon and I welcome them. Unlike the actions of those opposite when their bill was debated in June 2012, the gallery will not be cleared. They will be able to stay there and they will be welcomed by this side of the House. There are some hardworking members of the LGBTIQ community in the gallery, and I acknowledge some of them. Some are not here but I acknowledge Phil Browne of the LGBTIQ Action Group, a tireless advocate for that community; Michael Scott from the Queensland AIDS Council; Stephen Page and Mitchell Shrimpton; Mr Emile McPhee of the LGBTI Legal Service; and, of course, Shelly Argent of PFLAG—and I acknowledge Shelly in the gallery today as well as Phil Browne and Peter Black, who also form part of that team. There are many more in there—I see Richard and others who are in the galley and I acknowledge them all and say, 'Welcome to the gallery. You won't be cleared today. You will be able to stay until this is voted on and we get this up in the House today.'

I take the opportunity to also acknowledge the work of the Transgender Support Association of Queensland. The president, Gina Mather, and the secretary, Kristine Johnson, of that association have worked tirelessly since its inception in 1990. On the weekend the ATSAQ had their Christmas celebrations at the Sporties in Spring Hill. I went along with my daughter. We enjoyed the show and the festivities greatly. I know the member for Chatsworth has these two members of that community in his electorate. They do exceptionally hard work in not only supporting members of the transgender community but in raising policy issues and issues such as equality for civil partnerships and in other areas of the law in this state. I thank Gina and Christine very much for all their hard work.

I take this opportunity to sum up by saying that this bill is about rectifying a wrong that was done in 2012. This bill is about reversing a mean-spirited attitude towards the LGBTIQ community that existed back then. Although I welcome those opposite who will cross the floor and join us today to vote in favour of this bill, I say that this government's bill is about addressing an inequality brought about by those opposite. This bill is about equality. This bill is about recognition. This bill is about respect and valuing members of the LGBTIQ community. I stand here once again proudly commending this bill to the House. I look forward to voting in favour of it.