



30 April 2024

Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services

To the Honourable Mr Clayton Barr (MP),

My name is Dr Karen Pack. I am a religious historian and the president of [Spiritual Care Australia](http://www.spiritualcareaustralia.org.au), the peak body nationally for chaplains, spiritual carers and pastoral care workers across industries and sectors Australia wide. Our members include Muslims, Jewish rabbis, Hindus, Protestants, Catholics, and Humanist Chaplains. As such, I represent a broad cross section of faith communities.

As you heard today from Equality Australia and Rev Dr Ross Clifford, from 2018-2020 I was a tenured lecturer in Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care at Morling College in Sydney (the major Baptist Bible College in NSW). In that role, I was praised for my excellence as an educator, and the profound impact I had on the faith and practice of my students. Nonetheless, in April 2020 I was fired because I became engaged to my partner (now wife), Bronte Scott. As you are aware, the termination of my employment was legal due to existing carve outs in State and Federal discrimination laws.

The Equality Legislation Amendment seeks to remove these carve outs at State level, a move which I fully support.

I wish to respond to comments made by Rev Dr Clifford in today's proceedings (30 April 2024), as I believe they mischaracterise what took place both at the time, and subsequently.

In brief, Clifford's comments imply that I left the College of my own accord after "pastoral" discussions with him. This is not true. My employment was terminated by Rev Dr Clifford and the College Board, because I became engaged to my same-sex partner.

Clifford has claimed that the termination was not due to the gender of my partner, and that the same treatment would be meted out to a heterosexual person. This is a silly claim. No heterosexual person has been, or is likely to be, fired from the College because they became engaged. Of course, to Rev Dr Clifford my marriage does not have the same status as a heterosexual marriage, but of a de-facto relationship, which he also regards as morally unacceptable.

The letter I received from Clifford dated 31 March 2020 states, "I confirm our discussions that you will conclude any active faculty role at Morling, as of the end of term one (8th of April)."

The letter sent out to all staff on 9 April 2020 makes clear that the termination of my employment was Clifford's decision, not mine. It states, "Ross' decision for Karen to end her lecturing role was made with the support of the College Board and the Leadership Team." Likewise, the letter sent to all my students the same day states, "The decision for Karen to end her lecturing role was made by the Principal, with the knowledge and support of the Morling College Board and Leadership Team."

Both letters are also clear that the reason for my termination was my sexuality, and specifically the decision to marry a same-sex partner. The letter to staff states that the decision was made, "based

on the position on same-sex marriage of the College as stated in our Community Code as well as the Association's position [i.e. the position of the Baptist Association of NSW and ACT] and ongoing discussions." The letter to students states that the decision to terminate my employment, "was based on the position on same-sex marriage held by the College as stated in our Community Code as well as the Baptist Association's position and ongoing discussions."

This action would not have been taken in an identical situation relating to opposite-sex partners who became engaged.

The letters to staff and students also testify to my "deep and abiding faith in Jesus and [my] desire to live with integrity and honesty" (letter to staff). The letter to students states, "In no way does this decision indicate that we question Karen's deep and abiding faith in Jesus...". In other words, the sincerity of my faith and my devout Christian commitment was never under question. What was at issue was a particular standpoint on same sex relationships – one that is widely disputed across the Christian community.

The letter dated 31 March 2020 also states, "Although you will not be on faculty after that date, you will continue to receive your current salary until the end of classes' semester two (30th of October)."

I was appreciative of the six months' salary given to me – something which I did not request. My own understanding was that this was to encourage me to not "make a fuss". Clifford had said to me twice in the course of our meetings, "This could go very badly for you and us, if it is not handled correctly." I interpreted this to me that it would go badly should the media or the wider public find out. Clifford also explained to me that I was being treated with grace.

At no time have I claimed to have been "hounded off campus." At the time, I thanked Clifford for his "gracious" treatment. I have since come to see his comments and his behaviour as gaslighting me. There was, in my opinion, a veiled threat beneath his comments and behaviour.

Clifford claimed that I was given a farewell. This is also not true. I told at the time that I would be given a farewell, but to date this has not occurred.

I am happy to give further clarification surrounding the termination of my employment by Rev Dr Clifford (as Principal of Morling College at the time) should you require it. I am also willing to testify in person, to answer any questions you may have related either to my personal situation, or (in my capacity as a religious historian, theologian, and President of Spiritual Care Australia) to the wider contextual issues regarding the devastating trauma caused by discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in religious institutions.

I will include with this email copies of the letters to which I have referred, so that you may confirm the veracity of my statements.

Yours sincerely,



Rev Dr Karen Pack

President, Spiritual Care Australia

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