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LAW & JUSTICE

### Questions remaining from hearing

1. The Committee is aware of the literature review you recently co-authored on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parented families for the Australian Psychological Society. What is your understanding of the research evidence in relation to the long-term outcomes of children raised in families with same sex parents? Specifically:

- **What impact does same sex parenting have on children's wellbeing generally?**

Specific research findings suggest that when compared with heterosexual-headed families, two parent lesbian-headed families excel in the division of household labour, and in the quality of the interaction between both parents and the child. Research also suggests that non-heterosexual parents in general are **more** likely to be responsive to the needs of their children and **less** likely to use physical punishment. As a consequence of these familial processes, research has found that at the very least children in non-heterosexual families have experiences of family life similar to those of their peers with heterosexual parents. Some research has also suggested that children with non-heterosexual parents may experience considerable benefits, including above average levels of positive attachment to their parents, a higher than average sense of self-esteem, and above average levels of academic and social success. These findings would suggest that children of non-heterosexual parents, in general, experience positive wellbeing outcomes.

- **What impact does same sex parenting have specifically on children's gender and sexual identity?**

In relation to gender identity, research suggests that children of non-heterosexual parents are no more likely to experience gender confusion than are children of heterosexual parents. What **is** indicated by the research, however, is that children of non-heterosexual parents are often likely to be more flexible in their engagement with social norms around gender, and to understand that such norms do not necessarily have to curtail their choices in life. So, for example, girls with lesbian mothers may consider a wider range of employment opportunities available to them than may girls raised in heterosexual-headed households.

There is little research examining the sexual identities of children raised in non-heterosexual households, simply because we are still largely witnessing the first generation of children being openly raised and researched in such households. What little research there is suggests not so much an increased likelihood of non-heterosexual identification for children raised by non-heterosexual parents, but rather a greater acceptance of a range of sexual identities. In social contexts where discrimination continues to occur, and where many young people struggle coming to terms with a non-heterosexual identity, being more open to a range of sexual identities may be considered a positive outcome for these children.

**2. What is the evidence about the psychological benefits for children of certainty in care arrangements, for example in adoption as compared to long-term foster care?**

Children most benefit from living in contexts where the family processes are supportive, caring, and respectful. Children also benefit greatly from stability in their homelife, and when they know what their future is likely to hold. Stability and support can come in many forms, and this can include birth families, foster families and adoptive families. What is required is legislation that recognises all families, and which affords children the opportunity to be able to see their specific family form reflected in the world around them. Legislating for adoption or long-term care orders where appropriate will ensure that children experience the stability and support that they need and that they can remain connected to all those they consider to be family.

**3. In your view would adoption by same sex couples further the objectives of the *Adoption Act 2000*?**

- In the context of this inquiry, how do you interpret the Act's principle that the best interests of the child must be the paramount consideration in law and practice?

If we are to consider this Inquiry as centring upon questions of ideology, then it is possible to see how claims to acting in children's best interest have often served the purposes of those in power. Whether that be in relation to the Stolen Generations in Australia, or in past decisions to close records to adoptive children, the assumption that adults will always know what is best for children has often failed to produce ethical models for engaging with children. In the instance of adoption by non-heterosexual people, if we are to view this as having less to do with the rights of adoptive parents per se, and much more to do with the rights of all children to a safe and secure homelife, then the best interests of children must surely be to provide children with a wide range of placement options. Furthermore, if we are to acknowledge the existing body of research focusing on children of non-heterosexual parents, we can see that such children clearly express the belief that their best interests are met by their parents.

## Questions taken on advisement

- 1. A request was made to provide an example of 'social scientists' who have been involved in producing questionable research about lesbians and gay men and their fitness as parents and the professional bodies who have distanced themselves from these individuals.**

A key example of this is Paul Cameron, who has been discredited by, thrown out of, and publicly chastised by numerous professional organizations. In December of 1983, he was dropped by the Board of Directors of the American Psychological Association for violating the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists*. In October 1984, the Nebraska Psychological Association voted to "formally disassociate" itself from Cameron. And in August 1986, the American Sociological Association voted to condemn Cameron's "consistent misrepresentation of sociological research."

Cameron's testimony was discounted by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in *Gay Student Services v. Texas A & M University*, 737 F.2d 1317, 1330 (5th Cir. 1984), and the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas said Cameron's testimony, including his claims about gay parents and molestation, constituted fraud and misrepresentation, in *Baker v. Wade* 106 F.R.D. 526 D.C.Tex., 1985.

According to former US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, Paul Cameron advocated as early as 1983 for the extermination of gay men. In an interview with *Penthouse Forum* magazine he lobbied for the forcible tattooing and quarantine of people with AIDS, then said, "It probably would be a lot cheaper to just exterminate male homosexuals." (See Mark E. Pietrzyk, "Paul Cameron, professional sham," *The New Republic*, October 3, 1994.)

Any findings cited by those who would oppose the rights of lesbian and gay parents and their children that draw upon the work of Cameron and his associates must be placed under a high level of scrutiny in order to ensure that the findings provided are actually endorsed by the relevant professional bodies and that they follow acceptable scientific methods.

Another example of questionable research is that conducted by Professor Lynn Wardle, who in a published article reports that one study found "three of the thirteen [lesbian] mothers preferred for their daughters to become homosexual." In fact, the study finds no such thing. Instead it says that the three mothers did *not* prefer for their children to be gay, but found homosexuality, "if it had to be, more acceptable for their daughters than for their sons."

**2. In my testimony I offered to provide information as to the dubious quality of the Lerner and Nagai report.**

Dr. Robert Lerner and Dr. Althea Nagai were paid by a US anti-gay group to produce the 2001 book *No Basis: What the Studies Don't Tell Us About Same-Sex Parenting*. In the book, they say that not a single conclusion can be drawn about gay and lesbian parenting from any study ever done. Lerner and Nagai are not credible; they are researchers-for-hire who make their living writing studies for conservative organizations and finding results that support conservative social policies. One such organization funded a Lerner study that found African Americans were over three times more likely to be acquitted of rape charges than white Americans. To reach this conclusion Lerner looked at only five jury trials involving black defendants. (Roger Parloff, "Speaking of Junk Science," *The American Lawyer*, January 1997.) Yet in their 2001 book, Lerner and Nagai dismiss a study of over two-dozen gay parents for having an insufficient sample size. Clearly these researchers do not apply the standards they set for others in their own research. As such, we must question their ethics as researchers and the quality of the findings they produce.