

**Submission
No 31**

**INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (PARENTAL RIGHTS) BILL 2020**

Organisation: NSW Gender Centre

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NSW GENDER CENTRE SUBMISSION

On The Education Legislation
Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020

ABOUT THE GENDER CENTRE:

The Gender Centre is NSW's leading trans led organisation, providing 95% of all trans specific services in the state. We support over 500 NSW transgender and gender diverse families generally. Specifically, we provide case work, counselling and support for vulnerable families. Last year we helped 138 of these families.

The Gender Centre works directly with the NSW education department and the Department of Community and Justice to ensure that transgender, gender diverse and gender questioning young people are able to access the same rights and opportunities as every other NSW Child does in education and with support services.

As a frontline organisation we see the direct consequences that the continued focus upon the lives of trans people, children and their families, has on the mental health and opportunity of children.

Phinn Borg
Executive Director

Dear Portfolio Committee,

I'm writing to you on behalf of the Gender Centre to add some perspective to how the proposed Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020 will effect the Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) communities of NSW. The Gender Centre believes the effect of this bill on TGD families would add further serious hardship to the already difficult day to day lives of transgender, gender diverse, and gender questioning children and their families.

The Gender Centre estimates that transgender, gender diverse and gender questioning families make up at least 1% of the general population of NSW. This is a conservative figure and thus it is likely that the proposed bill will deleteriously effect more than 10,000 NSW families.

Of the families that the Gender Centre supports, around 1 in 5 are in crisis. That is probably around 2000 families in NSW right now. That means a combination of domestic violence and homelessness. That means one parent, quite often mum, has been forced to leave the family home because it is dangerous to remain there. It's likely that, that parent has taken not only a TGD child but any other siblings too. The difficulties TGD kids face are rarely separate from what their family faces. It is often impossible to separate into trans and non-TGD members. While transgender children and young people re presented as a threat to the very meaning of family, then families will continue to face disadvantage, stress and violence.

Approximately half of the families the Gender Centre supports are helped by the Centre to navigate the challenges of having a TGD child. This can be making sure that a school is aware of the right of all children to receive the same access to education as their cis-gender counterparts. Not more rights. Not rights that extinguish other people's rights. The same rights. There are probably around 5000 of these families in NSW. Families that are struggling to hold together. Families that are dedicated to taking care of their children. The one greatest challenge that parents of these families face is the risk of suicide.

The suicide rate amongst TGD young people is 48%, according to a recent study conducted by the WA Children's Hospital and led by Dr Ashleigh Lin,

I feel it might be relevant to the committee to give an idea of a 'normal' day for a TGD young person and their family.

In NSW the job of parents of TGD children is to keep their kids alive.

Families in Newcastle, families in the Hunter Valley, families in Tamworth, Taree, Albury, in Griffith and in Dubbo all tell the Gender Centre a remarkably similar story. One parent at home at all times to make sure that their TGD child doesn't commit suicide. For some families that means parents working part time. That means mortgages suffer. Or struggling to just not go backwards financially. That means online shopping and grocery delivery. That means incredible levels of hardship and stress. It means no time off.

Now imagine if on top of that news, celebrities, and politicians adamantly and on a daily basis held forth about the evils of transgender people and in particular accused parents of being abusive, negligent and mentally deranged.

Heaven help that family if someone falls sick and can't work. Heaven help that family if a marriage is on the rocks from the financial and emotional strain. Heaven help that family if they have a bad year on top of everything else.

But these extraordinary families somehow do manage to hold together. Because of the stigma placed on them by media and celebrities and politicians they keep their heads down, they hold on to each other and they keep their TGD kids alive. The Gender Centre sees and helps some of them, but so many of them we do not get to help. Somehow those families do get through, and manage to get their kids through as well.

I want to bring the committee's attention back to Dr Ashleigh Lin's extraordinary work. Her study found that attempted suicide rates amongst TGD youth is 20 times the national average. But there's more to this dreadful statistic. The attempted suicide rate amongst LGBTQI young people is 10 times the national average. But what Dr Lin found was that if you keep TGD kids within the safety of their families, if you provide those families with the support and resources to stay together then the attempted suicide rate of TGD young people drops to the national average.

Let me be explicit. That means that TGD young people have an attempted suicide rate at 20 times the national average. If you provide resources and support to those families to keep them together and they do stay together, then the attempted suicide rate plummets past the national LGBTQI average and becomes the same as other young people who make up the wider NSW society.

Whenever has a systemic, generational mental health problem like youth attempted suicide been so fixable, so reversible and already so in line with Australia's expectation of how we should be looking after families? Keeping families together is what we're asking and what is not being heard.

The Gender Centre provides support for the NSW Department of Education staff and teachers, accessible to all schools in NSW, advising on how to support TGD children so those children can access education like every other child in NSW.

In NSW the only practical way to support TGD children in schools is with their parents. The Gender Centre recognises that Education Bulletin 55 states that schools must support children in their chosen gender regardless of the parents wishes. In practical, bottom line terms nothing is possible without parental support.

All children do best with the love and support of their family around them.

The Gender Centre works with schools and teachers to understand the importance of the RIDE model: Respect, Inclusion, Dignity and Equality. That means that all students have the right to have their religion, cultural identity, sexual orientation and/or gender identity respected. A cornerstone of what the Gender Centre promotes is that nobody is required to accept or believe something outside of their system of value. However, in NSW everybody is required to respect the right of other people to their beliefs and identities and that schools and workplaces must ensure that no one can be discriminated against because of culture, religion sexuality or gender identity.

With all of this in mind the Gender Centre cannot recommend any aspect of the proposed Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020.

This bill in all of its propositions works to break apart vulnerable families and to stigmatise children. It's implementation would hav a direct effect on an already disgracefully high attempted TGD youth suicide rate in Australia