



The New Zealand Psychological Society

*Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa*

18 October, 2012

Secretariat  
Government Administration Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6011

### **Submission – (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill**

The New Zealand Psychological Society (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on this important issue. (See Appendix 1 for information about the Society).

#### ***An issue of Human Rights***

The Society supports the (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill. This Bill aims to ensure that all people, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity will have the opportunity to marry if they so choose. Our support for the Bill is based upon the view that marriage equality is a fundamental human right and that under the Human Rights Commission Act 1977 discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in any form became unlawful.

We are of the view that same-gender couples should have the same rights as other New Zealand citizens to obtain a marriage license from the State and that there is no reasonable ground to deny this right to any New Zealand citizen.

The NZPsS believes that the enactment of this legislation will assist in removing discrimination and prejudice experienced by same sex couples and in doing so will assist in our celebrating diversity and creating a more equitable society for us all. In addition many psychological studies have demonstrated that discrimination negatively affects both physical and psychological wellbeing.

## ***Psychology and Social Justice***

The document that underpins the Society's submission is the *The Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa New Zealand*.<sup>1</sup> This code forms the basis for psychologists' practice. Two sections of the *Code* in particular relate to this Bill. One of these is the requirement for "respect for the dignity of persons and peoples" which in turn requires psychologists to "seek to prevent or correct practices that are unjustly discriminatory". The other relates to social justice and responsibility to Society which relates to "addressing and challenging unjust societal norms and behaviours that disempower people at all levels of interaction"

## ***Research Evidence***

We agree with our colleagues in the Australian Psychological Society (APS) who note that psychological research provides no evidence that would legally justify discrimination against same-gender partners and their families.<sup>2</sup>

The APS notes

*...there is ample evidence that such discrimination contributes significantly to the risk of mental ill-health among gay, lesbian, bisexual and sex and/or gender diverse people, especially young people.*

A literature review prepared for the APS<sup>3</sup> showed that studies reported no differences in their samples according to the gender mix or sexuality of the children's parents in relation to the cognitive ability; social competence and level of behavioural problems; psychiatric rating; and self- esteem of the children.

We also support the view of the American Psychological Association that

*"Research has shown that marriage provides substantial psychological and physical health benefits due to the moral, economic and social support extended to married couples. Conversely, recent empirical evidence has illustrated the harmful psychological effect of policies restricting marriage rights for same-sex couples. Additionally, children raised by same-sex couples have been shown to be on par*

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<sup>1</sup> Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working In Aotearoa New Zealand 2008

<sup>2</sup> Australian Psychological Society 2010, Submission to Senate Inquiry: Marriage Equality Amendment Bill.

<sup>3</sup> Short, E. et al, 2007. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families: A Literature Review prepared by The Australian Psychological Society

*with the children of opposite-sex couples in their psychological adjustment, cognitive abilities and social functioning”.*<sup>4</sup>

### ***In Conclusion***

The New Zealand Psychological Society is of the view that

- the New Zealand Government should extend full recognition to legally married same-sex couples, according them the rights, benefits and responsibilities that are currently accorded to heterosexual couples. There is no reason to delay the passing of this important amendment
- recognising marriage equality is about, promoting and honouring principles of fairness and social inclusion and a commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of all New Zealand citizens.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Coleman', written in a cursive style.

Peter Coleman  
President

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2010/08/support-same-sex-marriage.aspx>

## **Appendix 1**

### **About the New Zealand Psychological Society**

The New Zealand Psychological Society, Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa was established as a stand alone incorporated society in 1967. It is the largest professional association for psychologists in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The Society aims to improve individual and community wellbeing by representing, promoting and advancing the scientific discipline and practice of psychology.

The values underpinning all parts of the NZPsS Strategic Plan are those stated in the four Principles on which the Code of Ethics, namely

- Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples
- Responsible caring
- Integrity of relationships
- Social justice and responsibility to society