MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM PAULA HARRIS

How would you characterise your views on the Bill in general?

In support

I strongly support the bill, which I believe to be well overdue. It will be a significant step forward for equality in Scotland, and it balances equality with respect for freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

How would you characterise your views on the introduction of same sex marriage, so that same sex couples can marry each other?

In support

Even though the legal rights and responsibilities of civil partnership and marriage are almost identical, the two are not perceived as of equal status and value. Civil partnership is seen as a legal contract, while marriage is seen by many as the gold standard for celebrating the joy of love and commitment. Marriage is very widely understood for its symbolism and its personal, community, and in some cases, religious significance. Very few people propose to their partner by asking “Will you civil partner me?” civil partnership just does not have the same meaning. The current ban on same-sex couples marrying is discriminatory and unacceptable. I personally am in a long-term, committed relationship with someone of the same sex who I love very deeply, and whom I will spend the rest of my life. We should have the same rights as heterosexual couples to celebrate this commitment through marriage if we choose. That would be equality. Civil partnership was invented specifically to deny same-sex couples access to marriage, and is seen by many same-sex couples as a second-class status. Put simply, equality means making the same choices available to all. If mixed-race couples were denied the opportunity to marry, and instead offered civil partnership with the same legal effects, that would readily be seen as unacceptable racist discrimination. The ban on same-sex couples marrying is equally unacceptable. It is very important that the bill does not create two different versions of marriage, same-sex marriage and heterosexual marriage, because that would lead to continued discrimination. The law should treat all marriages the same, regardless of the genders of the spouses.

How would you characterise your views on putting belief celebrants on the same footing as religious celebrants?

In support

I would like the opportunity for Humanist celebrants in Scotland to be given the same respect and legal footing as religious celebrants. As a modern, secular society Scotland to aim for this.

How would you characterise your views on the arrangements for authorising celebrants to solemnise opposite sex and same sex marriage (including the opt-in procedures)?
In support

I agree that religious and belief organisations should be free to decide for themselves whether to solemnise only mixed-sex marriages, or same-sex marriages as well. Some religious bodies want to conduct same-sex marriages, other religious bodies, including the larger churches, do not want to conduct same-sex marriages. Religious freedom should apply to both groups, and the bill gets the balance right. I think that the opt-in procedures in the bill are the appropriate way to do this.

How would you characterise your views on civil partnerships changing to marriages?

Neither

How would you characterise your views on allowing civil marriage ceremonies to take place anywhere, other than religious premises, agreed between the couple and registrar?

Neither

How would you characterise your views on allowing the religious and belief registration of civil partnerships?

Neither

How would you characterise your views on allowing transgender persons to stay married when obtaining a full Gender Recognition Certificate, which provides legal recognition in the acquired gender?

Neither

Would you like to comment on the wider issue of protections for those in society who may have concerns about same sex marriage?

Would you like to comment on the wider issue of freedom of speech?

Would you like to comment on any other wider issues in relation to the Bill that are not mentioned above?

Are you responding as...

a private individual

Paula Harris
14 August 2013