

FROM	Victoria University Wellington Students' Association
TO	Government Administration Committee
DATE	Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> October 2012
SUBJECT	<b>SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENT ON The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill</b>

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## 1) INTRODUCTION

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association submits to the Government Administration Committee on The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill in support of the Bill.

We wish to speak to our submission in Wellington.

## 2) ABOUT VUWSA

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association the main representative body for students at Victoria University. For over one hundred years VUWSA has been giving a voice to students about the issues they care about.

VUWSA currently has around 13,500 members, which represents over 70% of campus. VUWSA is a democratic organisation and is run by students for students. Many of our members maintain strong links to their communities in other centres, including being enrolled at an address outside the Wellington Central electorate. VUWSA has a long history in standing up for the rights of all our members to be treated equally under the law. Our members and our collective have been at the forefront of driving social change. The women's liberation movement, anti-war

movement, the Maori cultural and linguistic revival and the homosexuality decriminalisation movement have all at times found support and leadership on our campus, something VUWSA is incredibly proud of.

We are committed to fair, transparent and responsive representation. We work tirelessly to consult with our members, especially on issues that affect life off-campus.

### 3) STUDENT CONSULTATION PROCESS

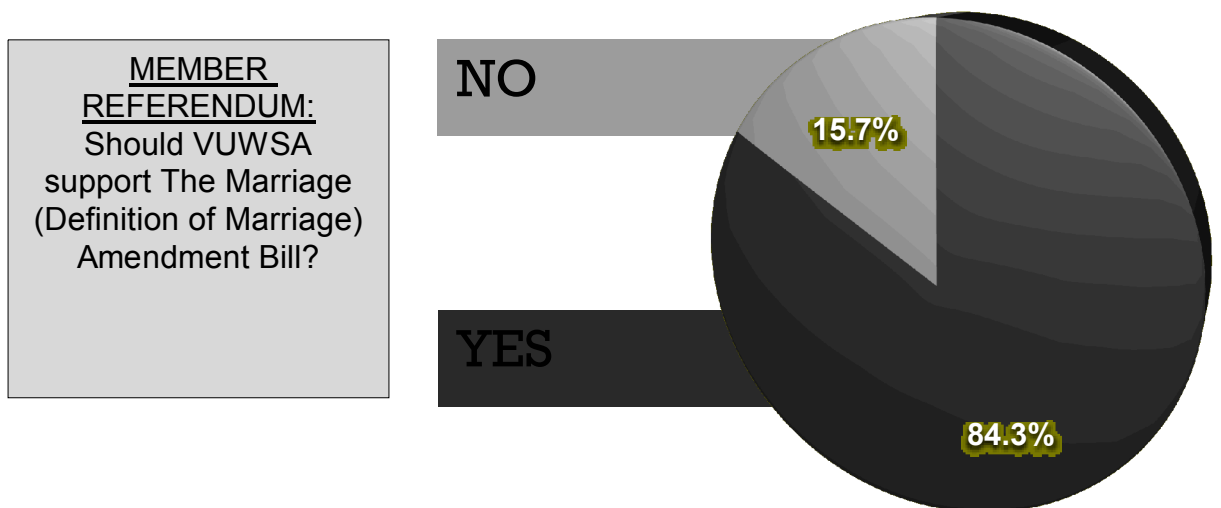
Consultation began with members on the issues of marriage equality and queer relationship rights in 2011.

**2011** VUWSA AGM motion to support the campaign Legalize Love is carried by a majority on the floor.

**08/2012** VUWSA AGM motion to actively support the The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill is carried by a majority on the floor.

**09/2012** A member requests a referendum be held with our General Election.

**10/2012** Referendum takes place, 84.3% (n=2382) support the proposition, 15.7% (n=444) oppose it.



While this submission has a strong mandate from students, we are aware that a minority of our members disagree with this position and have a different view of the Bill.

We have encouraged all members, no matter their view, to submit to this Committee in the hope that you may hear a wide-range of views from students.

#### **4) WHY MARRIAGE EQUALITY MATTERS**

Our members have told us through the above consultation, Facebook messages, Tweets and emails that they feel strongly VUWSA should take a stance on an issue that relates to the human rights of them and their friends, whanau and communities.

Students said that in a modern, secular society the rights of same sex couples to marriage licences should not be determined by the religious preferences of others –however large that group.

Instead, Parliament should take this opportunity to end state-led discrimination in the form of the current law, replacing it access to marriage for two (2) consenting adults, no matter their genders or sexual orientations.

Furthermore, members felt the current law was sending a detrimental message to LGBTI members of our community. Discrimination led by the state made members feel “less valued, less wanted and less human”.

Considering that many of our members are young people, a group with troublingly high suicide rates, which are much higher amongst LGBTI youth, Parliament has a moral responsibility, we believe, to ensure that every young person growing up in New Zealand feels valued and appreciated. Equality before the law is an important first step in achieving this.

#### **5) ISSUES WITH THE BILL**

The Bill in present form contains a Clause preventing the compulsion of churches to marry same sex couples, should they voice a protestation.

We feel that this Clause is contradictory to the intent of the Bill, which seeks to endorse equal rights for two (2) consenting adults to formalize their relationship.

We would ask the committee to consider deletion of this Clause.

#### **6) THANK YOU**

VUWSA thanks for the Committee for taking the time to read and hear our submission. Student engagement on this issue makes it clear there is no epidemic of apathy, rather a world of opportunities to engage people like our members.

VUWSA will be campaigning in favour of this Bill over the next few months, and providing opportunities for our members to get involved at every stage, including those with views contrary to our collective position.

Members of Parliament, community leaders and others are welcome to Campus to hear the views of our members.

We look forward to the continuation of this important debate, and the ultimate advancement to equality for all our members in the law.

Rory McCourt,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rory McCourt', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Vice-President Welfare 2012

On behalf of The Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association