

Letters to the Editor
The Mercury
Macquarie St
Hobart
TAS 7000

February 4 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write with a strong commendation for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Jeremy Rockliffe's preference for secular school councillors rather than Chaplains in State Government to be funded in schools in Tasmania. This is strongly in line with the constitutional separation of church and State. It also gives a sense of greater security to the Lesbian, Gay, Bi sexual and Transgender LGBTI Community that their young people very vulnerable to bullying will not be subject to Church doctrine being imposed on them as 'immoral and decadent' or the sometimes imposed 'conversion therapy'.

LGBTI are vulnerable to imposed poor self- image and above average rates of self- harming and suicide in the face of church inspired or conservative community elements that inspire rejection bullying and abuse.

In commending the Minister our community (LGBTI) do not underestimate the power of the right wing church inspired Abbott/Abetz Liberal Lobby in imposing Chaplains without a secular option on young people in public schools in Tasmania. I suspect that the Abbott Government insistence on funded Chaplains rather than secular counsellors is the hold-up to the appointment of Chaplains. This letter is also a call to the Premier to respect the value and importance of recognising, acknowledging and celebrating diversity in public schools by not compromising on this important issue. If compromise is the option the LGBTI community alongside other minority groups

are entitled to the appointment of secular councillors accredited and trained by the Tasmanian Anti- Discrimination Commission to support our young people in their human growth and spiritual dignity. The church have abrogated this role and have not the skills, capacity or empathy to undertake the role for a range of minority groups as the High Court has acknowledged now on two occasions.

The LGBTI community has experienced recently very difficult cases of Chaplains and Church inspired local government youth workers exploiting their role. The conflicted messaging of Churches that 'homosexuality is not normal' and 'that no one is born gay' using social media to confuse and abuse LGBTI students and young people has created many victims. There has not been any work to repair the damage or resurrect the young people suiciding in these cases by the responsible employing organisations.

Yours faithfully

Julian Punch AM