

I'm Patrick Jones- I'm 16, and a founding member of One Law For All NSW, a collective of young people advocating for reform to the ADA to protect LGBTQ+ youth in the NSW private education system. My group's submission to this review, attached for reference, outlines exactly what needs to change in the ADA for it to fulfil its purpose in protecting those vulnerable to unjust treatment and discrimination. In my personal submission, I'll show why this issue is so important to myself and those around me.

As a young, straight, white male, I have never had to fear, expect, or even consider the possibility of discrimination against me. I've never had to worry that something I am, something I have no control over, might be a cause for abuse, exclusion, or violence against me. I've never been told that I'll go to hell for who I am, I've never been told that I'm dirty or unnatural. I was born with the privilege of fitting the mould in every immediately obvious way. And for the majority of my life, almost every person I've called friend or family has been the same. If there was ever a reason in my life to consider the injustice that others face, it wasn't that it impacted me or the people I know.

But in the last few months alone, that has changed completely. A number of the people now among my closest friends identify as LGBTQ+, and hearing their stories and experiences of discrimination and the pain it caused them has broken my heart over and over again. One friend kicked out of their home twice because of their gender identity, forced to keep up with the pressures of school and extracurriculars, all while trying to keep a roof over their head. Another whose loving relationship ended because their partner was told it was sinful. Hearing these experiences drove me to look deeper into the issue, and what I found only got worse. Stories of physical, verbal, and social abuse in schools and communities. LGBTQ+ students being prevented from holding leadership positions or claiming recognition for their achievements. The fact that nearly 40% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously consider suicide. Story after story, statistic after statistic. So much hurt, so much pain, and all of it practically ignored by society at large.

Taking action against LGBTQ+ discrimination is no longer just a matter of principle to me, no longer an issue that I can care about yet put to the side in favour of more glamorous issues. It's a matter of standing up for the people I love. I can't bear witness to the pain and violence inflicted on some of the most vulnerable people in society and do nothing, while still calling myself a friend to the ones in my life who are most at risk of the same.

It's true that legislation can't be made solely on anecdotes. But for a government to be aware of the suffering allowed by its own law, and choose still to keep the status quo, is nothing if not a violation of its duty to care for all its people. Ignoring the voices of those brave enough to make them heard will not make the issue go away, and every life lost as a result is blood on the hands of a government too timid to act. So listen. Care. Feel the hurt of the tens of thousands of young LGBTQ+ people who just want to be themselves without fear. And when the time comes, act decisively to protect them.