

Date

DRAFT LETTER FOR LOCAL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT:

Dear (_____)

We are writing on behalf of the Monash Youth Committee (MYC), a Monash City Council-endorsed group which addresses and creates dialogue around important issues facing young people. We are wanting to create more conversation around the Respectful Relationships program that is currently offered in some schools across Australia. We feel this is a really important issue for all young people but we will highlight some of our local concerns.

Victorian police crime statistics of family violence incidents in the City of Monash increased by 25% in the last financial year. The City of Monash is one of the most culturally diverse communities in Victoria with around 45% of our population born overseas. Whilst data is limited, statistics suggest that CALD families are over represented in cases relating to domestic violence even though the CALD community are less inclined to seek support which indicates that the issue is significantly understated. Education in schools is such an important tool in reducing barriers faced by CALD communities in seeking domestic violence support. We require help from leaders who want to encourage and support schools to create a culture of respect and gender equity such as yourself; as the City of Monash is covered by the electorate of [insert electorate], you are in a position of influence within the local community.

We are concerned that the Respectful Relationships program is not reaching enough schools in the City of Monash, and by extension throughout Victoria and Nationally. Whilst Respectful Relationships education is mandated for government schools in Victoria there are 326 independent or Catholic schools who have chosen not to adopt a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships. In the City of Monash we have twenty (20) independent and catholic primary and secondary schools, our concern is that some of these schools may have chosen not to adopt the Respectful Relationships program. The respectful relationships program promotes self-awareness, communication and responsible decision making. Most importantly, this education creates dialogue around the issue of consent – an important topic that must be taught consistently across this country. We believe all schools in Monash and across Victoria and Australia should be supported and urged to implement Respectful Relationship training. Health and Physical Education is in the Australian Curriculum; however, the teaching of consent is not explicitly involved in the curriculum therefore is sometimes not considered in the delivering of education.

Along with the encouragement of implementation, we also believe the program should be inclusive of the LGBTQI+ community, young people with disabilities, culturally diverse people, and schools in rural parts of Australia. It is important the Respectful Relationships education provides information for these communities to ensure all students feel validated and understood. This may require more funding to allow teachers and communities to have access to quality professional development and support, as well as time to understand the implementation of these resources.

This school-based prevention strategy allows students of all ages to engage in conversations around unequal power relationships and create clarity around equality and respect. Some States have developed their own version of this education; however, we believe it is essential that there is one singular and unified program to provide consistency across the country and avoid differing understandings on significant topics.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. We hope this letter resonates with you and brings forward some ideas you agree with, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Email