

**Public hearing – *Births, Deaths and Marriages Bill 2022*, Tuesday 24 January 2023, Brisbane
– opening statement, Rachael Wong, CEO of Women’s Forum Australia**

Good morning and thank you for inviting us to appear today.

My name is Rachael Wong and I am the CEO of Women’s Forum Australia. With me I have Sall Grover, the CEO of women’s networking app Giggle, who has herself experienced acute harm from laws that conflate sex and gender. She is here to help represent all the Queensland women who have found themselves shut out of consultation on this rushed bill.

This bill has provoked strong emotions, with the Attorney General outright dismissing women’s concerns as transphobia. Not only do such comments embolden violence against women, I can assure you that if she had taken the time to actually meet and engage them in a genuine dialogue without derision, it would be abundantly clear there is no ill will towards trans people.

I believe those engaged in this process sincerely care about their fellow citizens’ safety, wellbeing and dignity. That those who support the bill are truly wanting to improve the lives of transgender people, and that those who don’t support the bill are deeply concerned about the harmful, far-reaching implications for all Queenslanders, but particularly for women and girls.

While behind this bill may be the best of intentions, these implications have not been fully understood, because if they had, this bill would not have been put forward in its current form.

With that said, I ask that you put yourselves in the shoes of the most vulnerable women who will be most adversely affected by this law.

Opposition to this bill is not a face-off between women and trans people, but rather a universal recognition of the importance of single-sex spaces and the risks that biological males can pose to women and girls. The rationale for why we have single-sex prisons, bathrooms, changing rooms, sports and so on, is based on an understanding of the biological sex differences between men and women and the value placed on protecting and progressing women’s dignity, safety, fairness and equality. Single-sex spaces are particularly important for victims of male-induced violence and trauma.

Just because someone does not identify with their biological sex, does not negate its existence.

A law which allows anyone to change their legal sex because of a perceived gender identity is based on a falsehood. It enables any male to self-identify as a woman and access female-only spaces, services, sports, opportunities, and even lesbian events, and undermines the very purpose of single-sex spaces. It disables critical sex-based data collection. And it opens up loopholes for predatory men to exploit the system and gain unfettered access to vulnerable women and girls. This point was made recently by the UN in its critique of Scotland’s similarly controversial bill, which was deemed so problematic by the UK government it has just used an unprecedented veto power to block it.

Despite the Attorney General's claim that there is no evidence transwomen pose an increased danger to biological women, the actual evidence tells a very different story.

The reality is, transwomen are biological males, and in addition to data showing that they retain male patterns of violence, examples of women being harmed by them in female-only spaces abound.

This past year, we have heard of transwomen raping women in female-only prisons, hospital wards and shelters. Sexual assaults by trans-identified males in female-only spaces are becoming disturbingly more common, but even one – the violation of one woman – should have been enough for self-ID laws worldwide to be abolished in an instant.

Self-ID laws affect the rights and safety of all women and girls. I have had mothers and fathers tell me their daughters hold on to go to the bathroom all day, because they are too scared to use the school bathroom with boys. I have had women contact me saying that aged care workers are required to dress biological men in female underwear and makeup as part of their sexual fetish. And then there are the mounting stories of female athletes who are losing out on places, awards and opportunities to biological males.

It is important to ensure that those who feel disconnected from their biological sex are treated with care and respect, but this cannot be achieved by removing hard won rights and protections for women.

Most of those deciding this bill will never be in the position of one of society's most disadvantaged women, serving time in prison or seeking refuge in a shelter. They will likely never be at risk of being cornered by a sexual abuser in a place that was meant to keep them safe. But they have a responsibility to protect those women and they also shoulder a responsibility for the consequences should they fail to do so.

I ask that the Committee listen to the voices of women. That you take seriously the countless stories of harm. And that you have the courage to stand up against this ill-conceived legislation.