

## **Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Hate Crimes and Hate-Motivated Violence**

**Date:** 27/3/2026

My name is Merrin Wake (she/her), and I am writing this submission as both a community member and a parent and with the permission of my son. I never expected to find myself here, describing an experience where both my own safety and my child's safety were threatened. But that is exactly what happened, and I feel a responsibility, as a parent, as a researcher, and as someone deeply connected to LGBTIQ+ communities in regional Victoria to speak up.

This isn't just a story about one incident. It's about what it feels like to live with the fear that comes from being targeted for who you are, or for supporting your child to be who they are.

On the 2nd of February, 2026, I received a death threat via a phone call to my personal phone, directed at me and my son. The caller called me names such as "child abuser" and "that my son would be better off dead than to have me as a parent" and much more. He also went on to describe where he knew my son and I would be that coming weekend. That weekend was the Geelong Rainbow Festival being held in Geelong.

I have been called things no loving parent should ever have to hear. Accused, blamed and dehumanised simply for supporting my child to be who he is. The words the caller used weren't just insulting, they cut deep into the very core of my identity as a parent. They made me feel unsafe in my own community and questioned in spaces where I should have been supported. These accusations weren't just targeting me but they were targeting my son's existence, our bond, and the love that keeps him alive and thriving. The emotional toll has been heavy, fear, sadness, anger, and moments of deep loneliness. But despite the harm these comments caused, they've also reinforced my commitment to protect my child, to stand beside him with pride, and to keep fighting for a world where parents are celebrated and not vilified for loving their children unconditionally.

It was confronting in a way that is hard to fully express in a submission. There was a moment, a long, still moment, where my brain couldn't quite catch up with what my ears were hearing. Then the fear hit.

The threat was not random. It came because of who we are, and because of the roles we play in our local community. As a parent, nothing compares to the feeling of knowing someone has intentionally targeted your child. The sense of violation stays with you long after the moment has passed.

Our lives immediately changed. I started double-checking the locks every night and my son became jumpy in public spaces he once felt comfortable in. We stopped attending some community events and I found myself scanning crowds in ways I had never done before.

The emotional impact was immediate and deep. But what has stayed with me most is the feeling that we were being punished for simply existing authentically.

I did report the threat, and because of my work and advocacy over many years I was fortunate to be able to contact key people including the Head of LGBTIQ+ Liaison Officer work at Victoria Police as well as the Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ communities who are both personal friends. This is not the case for so many young people and their families. But I want to be honest about how difficult that process was.

Living in a regional area means you are never anonymous, someone always knows someone. Also the fear of being judged, dismissed, or even accidentally "outed" is real.

I hesitated. I worried whether my son's identity would become gossip in our town. I worried whether people would say I was "overreacting." I worried that speaking up would put a target on us in an even bigger way.

And I know I'm not alone. Through my work and advocacy, I hear similar worries from many young LGBTIQ+ people and their families. The result is predictable, threats go under-reported, and victims stay silent.

The impact on my son has been intense. I was lucky enough that my partner is also the Principal at my son's school, therefore I was able to immediately contact them to ensure

my son's whereabouts and safety. Again this is not the experience of most young people and their families.

What happened affected my son more than I expected. He asked questions no young person should ever have to ask. He wanted to know whether someone might hurt him at school, or on the street, or when I wasn't there.

This experience has made my son question his very existence and has also created less spaces where he feels he can be a proud trans young person. This experience to some degree has "put my son back in the closet".

He stopped doing small things he had once loved, things like going to certain shops, visiting friends, or wearing things that felt like "him," in case it drew attention.

When a child begins to shrink themselves to stay safe, something is deeply wrong.

I love the community I live in. There are good people here, supportive people, caring people. But there is also a rising level of hostility toward LGBTIQ+ people and their families. I have seen this growing over the past few years, in the language people use, in the way young queer people speak about their fears, and in the stories families tell me when they don't know who else to confide in.

The death threat I received is part of a pattern, not an isolated event.

We need things to change, especially in regional/rural areas. People need clear, simple ways to report hate threats, especially young people. Anonymous or low-barrier reporting options would help enormously. We need regional support that actually exists in practice. Services that are visibly LGBTIQ+-affirming and professionals trained in cultural safety. We need safe enough spaces for young people to access care without fear.

Schools, councils, and local groups need practical resources to counter hate-based rhetoric and misinformation before it escalates. They need to be aware of their legal obligations and not treat this form of discrimination as simply another case of "bullying" as they often do.

We need educated and trained police officers and frontline workers with understanding of the unique risks for LGBTIQ+ people in small communities. This is essential. A threat in a regional/rural town doesn't feel the same as a threat in a city. I do not want my child too scared to ring for help if he needs it simply because he is trans.

Threats against children require specialised responses. Parents and families also need support, emotional, legal, and practical.

I am writing this submission because I don't want my son or any other young person to grow up thinking this kind of fear is normal or unavoidable. No parent should have to explain a death threat to their child, and no child should have to wonder why someone wants to hurt them for simply existing.

I hope this Inquiry recognises the urgency of addressing hate-motivated violence, especially in regional areas where support is thin and stigma can flourish in silence.

Thank you for considering our experience and for your commitment to this important work.

**Signed,**

*Merrin Wake*

Merrin Wake (on behalf of myself and my son)  
On Wadawurrung Country