



22 May 2023

Media Release: Pride in Law launches Victorian chapter with Chief Justice Anne Ferguson providing Keynote address

Pride in Law is pleased to announce that the formal launch of Pride in Law's Victorian Chapter, was held on 18 May 2023, in the Library of the Supreme Court of Victoria. The evening was a sell out and included a keynote address by Chief Justice Anne Ferguson of the Supreme Court of Victoria and Dr Matt Collins AM KC also providing an address.

Pride in Law is a National LGBTIQ+ Law Association. We are a non-political association aimed at connecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning and asexual (LGBTIQ+) members of the legal community and their allies. Pride in Law is not exclusive to any single area of legal discipline and aims to co-ordinate lawyer-to-lawyer education, social networking events and advocate for LGBTIQ+ rights in the legal landscape. Pride in Law has already established Chapters in Queensland and Western Australia, and the event celebrated the formal launch of the Victorian Chapter.

In her keynote address at the launch event, Chief Justice Ferguson acknowledged the contribution that LGBTIQ+ lawyers have made to the profession over many years in Victoria and nationally: "That contribution is both seen and unseen and covers the breadth of our profession helping clients at risk, keeping the wheels of commerce turning, delivering insights through academic endeavour, offering brilliant advocacy and enhancing our jurisprudence. When we open the Court each day, we do so with the purpose of serving the community by upholding the law through just, independent, and impartial decision making, and dispute resolution. That purpose is underpinned by values that include equality before the law, accessibility, integrity, courtesy and respect. We want all people to feel welcome in our courts and to thrive in our profession. We also want to build public confidence in the work of our courts and tribunals and reflect the values of the community of which we are a part. I commend Pride in Law Victoria for providing the time, space and energy to build advocacy, change and visibility in the law, as well as opportunities for networking and support within the communities and their allies", Chief Justice Ferguson said.

Dr Matt Collins AM KC also spoke at the event. He was the first openly LGBTIQ+ President of the Victorian Bar (2017–2019) and the Australian Bar Association (2021–2022). Dr Collins observed that earlier generations of LGBTIQ+ persons risked coming to the Supreme Court as persons accused of a felony carrying a maximum prison term of 15 years, and so it was particularly meaningful for Pride in Law to be launched in the Supreme Court Library and with the warm best wishes of the Chief Justice and the Court. Dr Collins added, "positive changes over time have been the result of three things: greater visibility of our communities; our unity and support for one another; and the judicious exercise of that stock-in-trade of our profession: patient, respectful and persuasive advocacy. And so it is right that those features—visibility, unity and advocacy—are the core objectives of Pride in Law."

The President of Pride in Law Victoria, Vanessa Bacchetti, has explained, "Pride in Law aims to create safe spaces and a sense of community for all LGBTQIA+ legal professionals, while also educating and advocating on matters affecting the LGBTQIA+ community."

When asked why Ms Bacchetti wanted to be involved with Pride in Law and to spearhead the launch in Victoria, they explained “a few years ago, I set out to find an LGBTQIA+ legal community in Melbourne. It was a shock to me that there was no similar organisation in Victoria already. I know from my involvement so far that Pride in Law has had wide-reaching impacts on individuals and the community at large. Members of our community have confided in me, saying that the organisation has made them feel accepted, proud, safe, and in one case, essentially saved their life. There is no doubt there has been a massive amount of progress over the last few decades for queer people in the law, but there is certainly more progress to come.”

Victorian Vice President, Tiffany Tullberg, added “many would assume that the legal profession would be a safe space in which practitioners are able to be themselves in their workplace. It is surprising how many people I have come across in my legal professional life that have felt a pressure to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity due to the risk, perceived or actual, that them expressing themselves completely at work will result in damaged career progress and reputation. It is clear from the August 2022 event that homophobia still exists in the profession, we want Pride in Law to be a safe space for professionals, students and allies but also a voice that advocates for the more inclusive legal profession that I know we can be.”

Pride in Law would like to provide a special thanks to their corporate sponsors. Without the support of our legal community in Victoria and nationally, we would not be in a position to launch the Victorian chapter.

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