

Written evidence from Mr and Mrs Burnett [HAB0358]

We submit that there is no need to extend the rights of cohabiting couples, and indeed that doing so will be positively harmful to family stability.

The facts are clear:

- The data shows that children of couples who are married are far less likely to experience their parents splitting up than children of cohabiting couples. By the age of five, the children of over 50% of cohabiting couples will have seen their parent separate, compared to around 15% for children of married couples.
- Family breakdown is clearly one of the most important root causes of many societal problems, including poor educational attainment, anti-social behaviour, drug abuse, crime and a perpetuating cycle of generational breakdown due to lack of good parental role models.
- It is therefore absolutely incumbent on this Government to priorities actions which contribute to the welfare of children and maximise their chances of growing up in a loving home with two parents.
- All other considerations, such as the convenience of cohabittees, must be secondary to those of the children who will form the next generation.
- Marriage provides a well-recognised way in which couples can make a public long-term commitment to each other, which clearly provides the best framework for raising a family. This institution has survived several millennia and we see no reason why it is insufficient.

In conclusion, and in response to the specific questions raised in the consultation:

- There is no need for a legal definition of cohabitation; marriage provides the necessary definition;
- There are existing legal remedies to protect cohabitating partners, provided legal documents such as wills are put in place;
- Marriage is accessible to all, so there are no equalities issues to address;
- We see no need for legal changes to protect children of cohabiting partners. Indeed it can only create difficulties by trying to introduce certainty into a relationship where the parties have deliberately chosen to retain the ambiguity of a lack of ongoing legal commitment;
- Cohabiting partners should not have the same rights as those who have chosen to make a commitment to each other in the form of marriage. The very lack of commitment is the logical reason why should be no entitlement to legal rights;
- We know of no examples of good practice in this area for the Government to adopt

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