Date

Dear Health and Wellbeing Minister Hon Meegan Fitzharris,

**Re: Girls uniform choices in schools reducing physical activity and wellbeing**

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I understand how many letters you receive, and how busy you are.

I am writing to you about [an issue that I feel passionately about, and one that impacts on the health of every girl in this country; school uniform options for girls. **– adapt this for how you would like it to read].**

Many schools in Australia allow girls to wear a range of uniform options, choosing between dresses, skirts, shorts and pants. However, a surprisingly large number do not allow girls this choice, and require female students to wear a dress or skirt to school. This is even more pronounced in high school.

This issue is important to me because**………[write your story here. Why do you care about this? Were you affected personally? Was your child/niece/cousin affected? Are you concerned as a women, a man who believes in the importance of physical activity for children and girls? Discuss here, and try to keep it brief. They won’t want to read an overly long letter].**

Of interest to me is the research that indicates that girls who wear dresses and skirts to school do less exercise than boys who wear shorts (Norrish, Farringdon, Bulsara, & Hands, 2012). In addition, research indicates that girls themselves identify dresses and skirts as a barrier to their engagement in physical activity, both on their way to school and during the lunch break (Stanley, Boshoff, & Dollman, 2012; Watson, Eliott, & Mehta, 2015). **[You may or may not want to include research literature. If you prefer a more personal approach, remove this information].**

Girls are unable to run freely, swing on the monkey bars, play soccer on the oval, and engage in a range of other active school activities when wearing a dress or skirt. **[When we attend the park, my daughter wears shorts and a shirt, as do the majority of other girls. – check this is accurate for you]** No-one who wants girls to be active would enforce that they wear skirts and dresses during physical activities, and it seems ridiculous that some schools force girls to wear skirts and dresses to school. In addition, girls who feel strongly against wearing skirts and dresses, for whatever reason, are psychologically distressed by being forced to do so. They are not forced in any other area of their lives to wear dresses or skirts, other than the school yard.

Toward the end of 2016, Active Healthy Kids Australia (AHKA) released its second Report Card on Physical Activity of Children and Young People. The Report Card assigned a grade of D- for both Overall Physical Activity and for Sedentary Behaviours. While the Report Card does show that as a nation we are lucky to be well equipped with physical activity facilities, supports and infrastructure within the home, school and community environments, it seems that Australian children are not using them*.* Dr Schranz, Active Healthy Kids Australia (AHKA) Co-Chair and Research Fellow from The University of South Australia, **and Vincent (2016)** argue that the “solution to this problem … requires the involvement of parents, schools, communities, local, state/territory and federal governments. We need a culture shift that sees physical activity being prioritised every day”.

Making girls wear skirts and dresses is an obvious factor that plays into the lack of physical activity we see in girls. Allowing girls to wear shorts once a week as their sports uniform, as if that is the only time they should be active, completely undermines the cultural shift that Schranz and Vincent describe, and sees school actively undermining the physical activity of girls. Changing into a sports uniform 1-2 times per week does not adequately cater for an active lifestyle.

As a large number of girls wear shorts and trousers regularly now, and almost all girls wear shorts when they want to be active, it seems ludicrous that schools have policies in place that disallow shorts for girls.

Are you aware of a national group, Girls’ Uniform Agenda (see www.girlsuniformagenda.org), who have made great strides in bringing this issue to public attention? Through their campaigning, the Western Australian government has changed the WA Education Department’s Student Dress Code to add that shorts and pants must be offered to all girls as part of the uniform policy. I would like to see a similar change enacted in the ACT’s education uniform policy document. The ACT representative of Girls’ Uniform Agenda, Amy Blain, is keen to work with the Education Department and the Health Department to make these changes (email: amy.l.blain@gmail.com).

I know that as Health and Wellbeing Minister, you are a major advocate for children being active and healthy. I wanted to ensure you were aware of the fact that uniform options which do not offer shorts and trousers for girls are negatively impacting on their ability to be active and healthy. I know that once aware of this issue, you will do all you can to support change in this area.

This letter is to request **[state here what you would like to happen. Do you want a meeting with the Minister or one of her representatives? Do you want a written response outlining answers to your concerns? Ask for a clear, detailed response.]**

I know that you support the rights of girls and value their ability to be active and healthy. If you could discuss this issue with the Minister for Education, and work toward finding a solution that supports girls in schools, that would be a wonderful way to demonstrate your commitment to the health of our girls.

I look forward to hearing from you.

**Name**

**Position** - let them know your influence here. Are you a coach? On a P&C?

An academic? A public health official?

Do you write or speak in the media? Are you a blogger?

**Contact details (email, address, phone number)**.