Date

Dear Health Minister Hon Roger Cook,

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

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.

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.

The Department of Education’s Dress Code for Students Policy and Procedures states that, *“*Councils and boards are encouraged to develop, as far as practicable, dress code requirements that do not discriminate on the basis of gender. This must include gender neutral options but may also involve items that are similar, but not necessarily the same, for all students. For example, a dress code could include gender neutral shirts and jackets for all students but may also include different styles of pants and shorts that suppliers categorise as male and female versions. Where community consultation indicates that gender specific items are popular (e.g. dresses, skirts) then it is appropriate to make those options available. In the case of female students, options must not be limited to skirts, dresses, skorts and culottes”.

Despite the clarity of this document, my child’s school, [name of school] is still not providing a range of suitable options for the girls. [add more detail here if you would like to about what is currently happening at your child’s school].

I know that as Health 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 his 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)**.