Date:

Name and address of sender

CC: [Name of School] P&C/P&F Association

# Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_[Principal]

# Re: Uniform Policy at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# I/We am/are writing to express concern about the uniform policy at our school.

# You may have seen recent reports about the inequity of not providing girls with formal shorts and pants in the uniform policy. These have been included in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Conversation, The Australian,* *Today Tonight* and other media outlets.

# My daughter, my husband/wife/partner and I are very concerned about the fact that she is being disadvantaged and discriminated against by not being provided with a formal uniform option which enables her to wear shorts or pants to school on the days during which she does not participate in sport.

# We draw your attention to the enclosed Information Sheet provided by the national advocacy group, Girls’ Uniform Agenda.

# We would appreciate it if you could discuss this matter with your teaching staff and also with the Parents’ Council.

We imagine that you support the rights of girls, and believe strongly in equity between male and female students. Popular sentiment is certainly with the right of girls to choose between appropriate uniform options at school.

Thank you for reading this letter, and we look forward to hearing from you about how we can proceed towards providing gender equity in the uniform provisions at \_\_\_\_\_\_ [name of school].

Yours sincerely

Parent/s name/s and signature/s

Contact details

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**Information Sheet**

Girls’ Uniform Agenda (girlsuniformagenda.org) is an Australia wide group, comprising parents, academics, educators and public health executives. Our aim is to encourage schools to recognise that girls have the right to wear clothes that they feel comfortable in at school, and appreciate that girls should be able to choose from a range of suitable formal and informal uniform options. While these options may be vast, they should include shorts and long pants for female students.

**National Legislation**

Not providing girls with the option of wearing shorts and long pants at school may be direct discrimination and in breach of the Federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*. Direct discrimination is when someone receives less favourable treatment on the ground of a protected attribute (such as sex) in circumstances that are the same or not materially different. It can be argued that girls are being treated less favourably than boys by not having access to shorts and long pants and the freedom these items allow.

**State Legislation and Policy**

In New South Wales, The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977,* also states that discrimination occurs when a person treats another less favourably than in the same circumstances, they would treat a person of the opposite sex. The Act also states that it is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a student on the ground of sex by denying the student access, or limiting the student’s access, to any benefit provided by the educational authority.

In addition, The Department of Education School Uniform Policy and Guidelines, revised in July 2018, explicitly states that girls must be offered shorts and pants. Key sections are:

1.4 All students should have the opportunity to access the full range of school activities, including physical activities while wearing a school uniform, and **girls must have the option to wear shorts and pants**.

1.9 A school uniform should include items that are affordable, comfortable, made from easy-care fabrics, appropriate for activity and **suitable for all body shapes**.

In addition, the departmental guidelines that accompany the policy are important. Under ‘Wellbeing factors to be considered’, it states that **“Short and pants options are available, including specific options for girls”**.

These policies and guidelines make it clear that girls MUST be offered shorts and pants. This decision is no longer at the discretion of individual schools.

**Why is it important that girls are offered a range of choices in their school uniform?**

* Dresses and skirts can have a negative impact on girls’ activity levels which in turn can impact their longer-term health (Norrish, Farringdon, Bulsara & Hands, 2012; Stanley, Boshoff, & Dollman, 2012; Watson, Eliott, & Mehta, 2015). The wearing of a dress and skirt seriously undermines a girls ability to engage in active play and sport, and is likely to be one of the key factors explaining the low participation rates of girls in physical activity (ABS, 2013);
* The need for clothing that is warm in winter (long pants) and cool in summer (shorts), and recognition that tights do not offer the same warmth and some girls find them uncomfortable;
* The fact that some girls dislike wearing skirts and dresses, and can be incredibly concerned about modesty issues;
* Expectations about women’s clothing have changed dramatically over time, and many girls and women routinely wear shorts and long pants in their everyday life, including at home, work and educational institutions. Girls have the right, and should be provided the option, to wear shorts and pants at school.
* The fact that rigid uniform dress codes can undermine the important relationship between schools, students, and families. When this occurs the person who loses is the student.
* The requirement that girls wear dresses or skirts only, when they do not wish to, implies there is something inappropriate about girls wearing shorts or long pants. This can negatively impacts on girls’ self-esteem, their sense of justice, their learning, and their relationship with the school and education system.
* Often, the cost of skirts and tights for girls is significantly more than the cost of shorts for boys. This is inequitable.
* The disadvantage that results from girls having to wear skirts and dresses without the option of wearing shorts and long pants could be interpreted as gender discrimination, which may leave schools vulnerable to legal action (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2007).

Most Australians support the rights of girls, and believe strongly in equity between male and female students. Indeed the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins, supports the work of Girls’ Uniform Agenda and the right of girls to wear shorts and pants to school. Girls’ Uniform Agenda is able to offer support to schools as they change their uniform policy to ensure it aligns with federal and state legislation and policy. A member of Girls’ Uniform Agenda from NSW would be most willing to discuss ideas for moving forward.

**Girls’ Uniform Agenda can be contacted on: enquiries@girlsuniformagenda.org**