Date:

Name and address of sender

CC: [Name of School] P&C/P&F Association [add this here if you want to send this letter to your school’s P&C/P&F also)

# Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_[put your principal’s name here]

# I am / we are writing to you because [explain here why you are writing this letter. What is it that matters to you?]

# As a girl/girls/student/s at this school, I think it is unfair that [explain why you think it is unfair that girls cannot wear shorts at school. How does not being able to wear shorts impact on you, and your friends? Does it stop you playing with friends/doing sport at lunch time? Are you worried about flashing your underwear? Does the current uniform make you feel too hot, or too cold? You can put a list of your reasons here].

# I/We have included an information sheet from a group called Girls’ Uniform Agenda, who are fighting for the rights of girls like me, so that we can wear shorts and long pants to school, if we choose to.

# Can you please read this information, and talk it over with teachers and parents. It would be great if all the students in our school can talk about this, and if girls can be asked whether they want a shorts and long pants option.

Thank you for reading this letter, and I/we look forward to hearing from you about how we can make simple changes to our uniform, so that girls at school can choose shorts and long pants if they wish to.

Yours sincerely

Student/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**

The *Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission* guidelines clarify the legal obligations of schools under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic).* The Education and Training Committee of the Commission recognises gender differences in dress codes and school uniform policies as an area of risk for schools with respect to discrimination. The guidelines state that “school councils are ... advised to formulate, as far as practicable, dress code requirements that are similar for both sexes. In general, where options are to be available, they should be available to all students. **In particular, all schools must allow girls the option of pants and shorts in their dress code.**”

In Victoria, the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* also states that direct discrimination occurs if a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. In addition, the *Victorian State Government Education and Training Student Dress Code Policy* states that the school council must consider if the dress code “is compatible with state and federal human rights and anti-discrimination legislation” and “ensures that any gender specific requirements accord with school community standards and anti-discrimination legislation”. Further, this policy states that “schools should … provide suitable options within the dress code”.

Adding a girls’ formal shorts and shirt and long pants option, alongside the boys’ formal shorts and shirt and long pants option, can fulfil these requirements and enhance equity for girls at your school. Similarly, making the unisex sports uniform of shorts and polo shirt acceptable wear for each gender every day would also meet these requirements.

**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 based in Victoria would be most willing to discuss ideas for moving forward.

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