

Row over badge at The Scottish Parliament

Holyrood's top official has been called on to launch a full investigation after a woman complained she was told could not wear a "Scottish Lesbian" badge while visiting the Scottish Parliament.

Jeremy Balfour, MSP for Lothian, has written to Presiding Officer Alison Johnstone calling for her to investigate after a constituent was "discriminated against whilst attending the Scottish Parliament".

He insists it was a "straightforward matter of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation".



Jeremy Balfour, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.
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Mr Balfour said Jenny Willmott, co-founder of the campaign group Scottish Lesbians, was asked to remove a badge with the wording “Scottish Lesbians” as it was a “partisan message”.

In his letter, Mr Balfour said: “It has been raised that there are many staff and elected representatives who wear rainbow lanyards, ironically, this is supposed to include lesbians.

“It does seem unacceptable that a lesbian making her sexual orientation public was considered an unacceptable political statement.

“This appears to be lesophobia... a straightforward matter of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. I therefore ask if this will be fully investigated.”

Ms Willmott said she was visiting the parliament for a Women’s Right Network round table event earlier this month hosted by Tess White, MSP, when she was told by security staff that she

couldn't wear her badge because it was "too political".

She has submitted a formal complaint to the Presiding Officer.

Ms Willmott said: "After being told I couldn't wear the badge, when I then got into the foyer, the staff member who checked me in was wearing a rainbow lanyard, as were several other staff members.

"Not only was it hypocritical for me to be asked to remove my badge when staff members were openly wearing rainbow colours, we have been advised that it constitutes discrimination on the grounds that I was prevented from expressing my sexual orientation and showing support for other lesbians.

"Accordingly, I have submitted a formal complaint to the Scottish Parliament."

Ms Willmot said she had also received advice and backing from Joanna Cherry, SNP MP for Edinburgh South West.

She added: "Joanna Cherry said I should complain on the grounds of being prevented from expressing my sexuality and my support for other lesbians, while employees of the Scottish Parliament are allowed to express support for protected characteristics (under the Equality Act)."

In her complaint, Ms Willmot says: "I wish to make a complaint on the grounds that I was prevented from expressing my sexuality, and my support for other lesbians, while employees of the Scottish Parliament are permitted to express their support for other protected characteristics by wearing a rainbow lanyard.

"I would appreciate some clarification of why the words 'Scottish Lesbians' indicate a partisan or political position while the rainbow lanyard does not."

She adds: "I would also like some reassurance that, in future, lesbians who wish to indicate their sexual orientation and

support for other lesbians by wearing their Scottish Lesbians badge will be welcome at the Scottish Parliament.”

The Scottish Parliament has previously been forced to apologise after a woman was ejected from a committee meeting for refusing to remove a scarf in the suffragette colours of purple, green and white.

The woman was asked to leave a session of the equalities committee which was discussing proposed reforms to Scotland’s gender recognition laws in 2022.

Presiding officer Alison Johnston later said her removal was an error and confirmed that suffrage colours were not banned from Holyrood.

A spokesman for The Scottish Parliament said: “We can confirm that a visitor was asked to remove a badge and we are currently investigating this.”

He added that “the Parliament endeavours to investigate all complaints within 20 working days”.



**SCOTTISH
LESBIANS**