

Media Release

FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS DO NOT SUPPORT CURRENT RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BILL

Leaders from Victoria's most prominent faith-based and religious community service organisations have come together to urge the Federal Government not to implement the Religious Discrimination Bill as proposed.

Anglicare Victoria, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Jesuit Social Services, Jewish Care Victoria, McAuley Community Services for Women, Sacred Heart Mission and Uniting Vic. Tas have today joined to voice their concerns about the latest draft of the Religious Discriminations Bill and its potential to allow people and organisations to use faith as a means to cause harm to clients, customers, staff and volunteers.

Although we come from different faiths, religions and cultures, we are united in our focus on community and social service.

We are proud of the work we do. We believe a divisive national conversation about whether people of faith should be able to discriminate against people of no, or different faiths, is not in the national interest. It is our view that religious freedom must be balanced against the rights of the people.

Religious organisations such as ours have demonstrated that it is possible to uphold the religious faith on which our work is founded – providing services to anyone who needs them – while at the same time respecting the diverse faith of our workforce, volunteers, clients and residents.

We are concerned that the legislation will have unintended consequences, where expressions of religious belief will be privileged above the rights and interests of other Australians in being free from discrimination.

The proposed Religious Discrimination Bill has the potential to create additional barriers for people in accessing medical services and housing, engaging in employment and participating in social and public life.

For people who are marginalised and experiencing social exclusion, and have a limited ability to self-advocate, this is likely to cause further harm and distress.

We do not support the Religious Discrimination Bill as it currently stands, as we do not believe it will benefit the Australian community.

We urge the Federal Government to legislate to protect religious freedom without removing protections from those who need it. Our laws should protect all of us, equally.

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Quote attributable to CEO Anglicare Victoria, Paul McDonald

“As a faith-based organisation of significance, Anglicare Victoria rejects the current draft of the Religious Discrimination Bill because of the far reaching discrimination it now promotes.”

Quotes attributable to CEO Jewish Care Victoria, Bill Appleby

“As the CEO of an ethno-specific community service organisation, it fills me with an enormous sense of pride knowing that every day we have people from all corners of our global village providing much-needed supports and services to vulnerable people. We are committed to embracing the rich diversity of the community, and stand strongly against any law that allows individuals and groups to marginalise or diminish the value of others.”

“Jewish Care Victoria recognises that we, as a community, are at our strongest when we celebrate our differences and stand alongside each other, not when we exclude, discriminate, or isolate those that do not share our own lived experiences. Legislating the right to judge a person’s value based on their ability, religion, sexuality, gender expression, or marital status is not what civil societies are built upon.”

“We are humbled every single day with the opportunity to provide care and support to those that need it the most. Our staff do this inclusively, without judgment, and based only on the person’s needs – it is, in fact, the rich diversity within our organisation that allows us to meet such a wide range of needs. Whilst we firmly believe in the freedom of religion under law, we have equal belief in the law being equitable for all, and a person’s right to be free from those that seek to discriminate against them.”

Quotes attributable to CEO Sacred Heart Mission, Cathy Humphrey

"It is our view that the draft Religious Discrimination Bill will allow people and organisations to use faith as a means to cause harm, including excluding people from accessing essential services."

"Sacred Heart Mission engages a diversity of people, staff and volunteers, to work across a wide range of services and in our opportunity shops. We do not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, disability, gender or sexual orientation. It is not our intention to do so, even in the event of a change in legislation."

"Today we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that our services and workplaces are safe and welcoming for all people, regardless of their sexuality, gender orientation, marital status, ability or beliefs."

Quote attributable to CEO Uniting Vic. Tas Bronwyn Pike

“There are no grounds on which religion can be a justification for saying or doing harmful things. This Bill goes too far and must be withdrawn.”

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