



**Media release: Community groups call for more time for ‘unintended consequences’ of Religious Discrimination Bill to be considered.**

***Note to press gallery: Community groups will hold a press conference on the lawn of Parliament House at 11:30am, today (Monday 29 November)***

**29<sup>th</sup> November 2021** - A coalition of groups has today called on the Morrison Government to guarantee the Religious Discrimination Bill will not be brought to a vote until the joint parliamentary committee inquiry has had sufficient time to hold public hearings considering its impacts on vulnerable communities.

The group, including representatives of faith, multicultural, business, disability, women’s and LGBTIQ+ groups has joined unions, ACOSS and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners in Canberra today seeking to meet urgently with Attorney-General Michaelia Cash to discuss their concerns with the Bill and the inquiry process.

“People of faith should of course be protected from discrimination, but this is a complicated piece of legislation that may have unintended consequences, winding back hard-fought protections for vulnerable communities, including those that faith-based organisations work with and minorities within our faith groups themselves”, said the **Revd Dr Jo Inkpin, of Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney.**

“It would be both irresponsible and unreasonable for the parliament to vote on this legislation before fully understanding these impacts and the fuller complexity of Australian religious life. The Bill must not be brought to a vote before it has been properly considered by the inquiry”, she said.

The group are requesting that the Parliament ensure time for public hearings and for the current deadline – reported to be February 4 – be extended to allow meaningful participation by people affected by the draft laws.

“FECCA is deeply concerned about the potential unintended consequences of the Religious Discrimination Bill, including the risk that it becomes a tool to divide multicultural communities. We want Parliamentarians to ensure that any discrimination laws protect everyone equally. We oppose all forms of discrimination against people,” said **Mohammad Al-Khafaji, CEO of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council Australia (FECCA).**

“Our laws should protect all of us, equally. But the Religious Discrimination Bill includes unprecedented and dangerous provisions that override existing protections for women, as well as people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people of colour, LGBTIQ+ people and even people of faith,” said **Helen Dalley-Fisher from Equality Rights Alliance,** a peak women’s rights organisation.

“Unlike the secret hearings of the Ruddock Review, the committee’s inquiry into the Religious Discrimination must allow sufficient time for public hearings to ensure the Australian community and representatives of both houses of parliament hear directly from community members who stand to be impacted by these laws”, said **Anna Brown, CEO of Equality Australia.**



"People with disability stand to lose protections under the changes proposed in the Religious Discrimination Bill so it's important that the community be included in the inquiry process and hearings be accessible to all members of the community who wish to participate" said **Sebastian Zagarella, CEO, from People with Disability Australia**

**Dr Emma Campbell ACTCOSS CEO speaking on behalf of ACOSS** said that:

"People of faith should of course be protected from discrimination, but we are really concerned that the 'statements of belief' provisions included in the draft bill will undermine people's right to respect and dignity whenever they access essential goods and services provided to the public."

**Dr Karen Price, President of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners,** said

"We remain concerned of the potential impact of the bill on the delivery and access to some women's health services, and vulnerable groups' access to health services they need.

"The proposed law could compound negative community attitudes toward those most vulnerable including minority groups and the LGBTIQ+ community, as well as those in rural areas with fewer health services available.

"These impacts must be properly understood before the Bill is brought to a vote, through a process that allows these vulnerable groups to provide evidence in public hearings."

**CEO of Temple & Webster, Mark Coulter,** who is a board member of Equality Australia said:

"Business leaders have worked hard over decades to build and preserve inclusive workplaces for women, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people from diverse ethnic and faith backgrounds. The statements of belief provisions included in this draft of the Religious Discrimination Bill risk compromising these environments.

"This legislation may exposes companies to reputational, financial and potentially legal risks and complicate enforcement of organisational codes of conduct."

**Lisa Annese, CEO, Diversity Council Australia (DCA):**

"DCA supports individuals being protected from discrimination and harassment because of their religious belief.

"But we have concerns that this Bill would interfere with the ability of organisations to promote inclusive cultures for everyone.

"This is complex legislation, and we strongly urge the government to ensure that there is adequate time for consultation."

**Anthony Odgers, Assistant Federal Secretary of the Independent Education Union of Australia** said:

"Australians should be protected from discrimination based on their religion or lack of it. This Bill isn't designed to do that. It is founded in the resentment of those who opposed equal marriage and seeks to perpetuate old prejudices.



“In proposing a wide exemption from discrimination legislation for employers in religious schools it fails every test of fairness.”

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