

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Victoria Hamblin and I am writing to you to address the anti-discrimination law changes proposed by the Australian Law Reform regarding Religious Educational Institutions. Having been a student at a Christian school and now a teacher, the potential introduction of these laws raises a myriad of concerns that I wish to address within this letter.

At the outset, a foundational feature of Religious Educational Institutions is that **all** of the staff members employed by that school must be adherents of the faith that the school professes. It is not just a requirement of chaplains or Religious Studies teachers. **All** staff must profess to be adherents to the faith. Indeed, it is this requirement of Religious Schools that sets them apart to be Religious Educational Institutions to begin with. It is through having this as a foundational requirement of all staff members that a '*community of faith*' or a '*culture of faith*' is fostered and developed. Without this core tenant and requirement of Religious Schools, these schools would be unable to consistently develop and foster the school culture, values and community of faith across the entirety of their students' schooling careers.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics¹, Independent Schools are the fastest growing schooling sector in NSW and indeed across all of Australia. Religious Educational Institutions come under this category of schooling in Australia. As a teacher at an Independent Christian school myself, I can personally attest to this statistic, having seen the number of students enrolled at my school steadily increase since I commenced working there 4 years ago. Due to the fee structure that these schools demand, Religious Schools offer higher disciplinary action for defiant conduct that is unable to be offered by the Public sector. Thus, in conjunction to these consequences, Religious Schools also educate students into their '*culture or community of faith.*' This is enabled through the consistent adherence of all staff members to the foundational religious beliefs and values of all staff members of the school.

As a teacher at a Christian school, I am seeing an increasing trend of non-religious families opting to send their students to a Religious School. Families within Australia are beginning to notice that the community and culture of faith that is fostered in these schools effectively teaches their children character and life values that will place them in good stead for the entirety of their lives. By allowing Religious Schools to continue to discriminate *who they employ*, Religious Schools can ensure that their community of faith is safe guarded and can be consistently developed into the years to come. Furthermore, by allowing this discrimination, parents are empowered and given ownership over their child's education, and can choose the character and life values that they wish the educational sector to imbue into their child's life.

I ask you, as a parent seeking a quality education for your child, would you choose a school that seeks to foster character and life values into your child's life? Or would you merely

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/2022>

choose the school that provided your child with an academic education yet bypassed the ongoing education of their character and life values?

As a teacher, I have come to see and believe that parents will choose what is best for their children, even if this comes with a high monetary price. Through sending their children to Religious Schools, parents are showing their support for their children to be educated by a community and culture of faith, one that esteems and promotes good character and life values across the entirety of their child's education. This is only enabled by all staff members of Religious Schools adhering to the same core religious beliefs.

Over recent years, the societal framework of Australia has undergone steady change. LGBTQIA+ persons have gained a greater voice and are now being accepted more readily within society. Whilst Religious Schools may be accused of being discriminate to those who identify as LGBTQIA+, from my personal experience, the opposite is closer to the truth. The community and culture of faith developed by Religious Schools is one that places inherent dignity and value upon all human life. By all staff adhering to the same core values and beliefs, LGBTQIA+ students have not only been accepted, but have been educated in a supportive educational environment. However, if a Religious School's ability to discriminate who they employ is denied to them, the culture of these schools will, over time, become eroded and less consistent. LGBTQIA+ students will, in turn, not receive the ongoing support, care, dignity and attention that they desire. Indeed, it is the community and culture of faith offered in these schools that equips and enables them to be supportive environments for all of their students.

As we observe the continual changing of our society, I ask you, is it wise to alter long established institutions that have faithfully provided for thousands of students and families across many years? By denying Religious Schools the freedom to discriminate who they employ, they are in essence being discriminated against. By enshrining anti-discrimination laws against one group of people, these people are in turn denied the ability to express their beliefs and opinions in a way that is consistent to their experience of life. Furthermore, by passing these anti-discrimination laws, parental choice over the character and values that are imbued into their children through the education system will effectively be denied to them also.

I ask you to reconsider the extent of this law reform and the long term effect that these laws will have on Religious Schools. By enforcing these anti-discrimination laws, Religious Schools will be unable to foster and maintain a community and culture of faith that is not only expressed through their values, but reflects the greater desires of many parents and carers alike.

I thank you for your time in reading my submission.

Your Sincerely,

Victoria Hamblin