

10th December 2012

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my deep concern over the changes being proposed to the current Anti-Discrimination Bill. My concern is that the changes being proposed, while seeking to enhance protection for some people, will adversely impact on the human rights of others. In particular, I regard freedom of speech as much more important than a person's 'right' not to be 'offended or insulted'. Trying to protect some people from being offended has led in other states and countries to the loss of rights for others. The right to free speech, which has always been a part of our society and our political system, must in no way be curtailed. It is a cornerstone of Australia's democracy that everyone, citizen and non-citizen alike, has the right to express personal views, provided that they do not incite to violence or racial hatred. Speech or behaviour that "offends or insults" someone else is not discrimination and to label it so would increase the likelihood of vexatious claims.

Also of great concern is the suggestion that the onus be moved to the respondent to prove there was no unlawful discrimination, as this would lead without doubt to an increasing number of nuisance claims.

In addition, the suggestion that religious bodies and educational institutions have their 'exceptions', designed to protect their religious freedom, reviewed every three years is an onerous burden on often small and poorly funded organisations. Such organisations, such as churches, are ill-equipped to deal with an increase in paperwork due to greater regulation and to litigious complaints arising from the new legislation.

In an effort to protect and extend the rights of some sections of the community, these proposed changes would have the effect of impinging upon and reducing the rights of many others.

I urge you not to adopt these proposed changes.

Yours sincerely,