

Dear Senators,

I write to you in support of the Tax Laws Amendment (Public Benefit Test) Bill 2010. I would like to see this Bill passed unchanged.

This amendment will serve the public in two ways. By ensuring a greater scrutiny of organisations that apply for tax free status, we are helping to protect potentially vulnerable members of the Australian public from the activities of dangerous cults, a clear public good. Additionally, the money saved is kept in the public purse for use funding important social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, benefitting all Australians.

Previously, I thought that existing measures were adequate to prevent dangerous cults. However, the recent raids on Agape Ministries International, revealing weapons stockpiling, ideological brainwashing and horrific child abuse, prove that this is simply not the case. It makes me sick to think that the Australian Tax Office (ATO) has explicitly supported this organisation for many years by granting them tax free status.

The ATO already has an excellent framework for testing most organisations that request tax free status. The current process for assessing non-religious charities is well tuned and fair. Thousands of secular charities have achieved tax free status and more join their ranks every year. There is no reason why all groups seeking tax free status should not undergo the same scrutiny.

Importantly, there should be no risk of a public benefit test hindering charities run by reputable religious organisations whose operations meet Australian community standards. Religious charities such as Youth off the Streets (www.youthoffthestreets.com.au) or the Salvation Army (www.salvos.org.au) should have no problem passing a such a test.

The term "public benefit" is clear and, with common sense, easily applied. Any organisation that doesn't provide the bulk its services freely and openly to those who do not donate to it is not a charity and, accordingly, should not receive tax-free status.

For the sake of vulnerable Australians and for the broader public good, I urge you to support this important Bill.

Regards,