



20 December 2021

Dr Anne Webster MP
Chair
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: religionbills@aph.gov.au

Dear Dr Webster

RE: Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 and related bills

Since 1982, Sacred Heart Mission as a Catholic Social Service organisation has aspired to be the church in action by serving the marginalized and vulnerable members of our community with love, respect, justice, hope and joy.

Our vision is of a fair and compassionate community in which people can realise their potential. We do this by respecting the dignity of every individual, by sharing our hope, and by encouraging people to regain control of their lives.

Our values require us to question and challenge unjust social structures which may cause harm and disadvantage, and to advocate for those who do not have a voice in these conversations.

It is our view that while the third iteration of this package of legislation has improved, we have significant concerns that the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021, and related bills, will facilitate discrimination within our community. We believe it will exclude people from accessing essential services, such as health care and social services; and cause harm and distress to people who are already vulnerable within our society.

Religious freedom must be balanced against the rights of all people. However, we do not believe the legislative package proposed will achieve this.

We endorse the submission by Equality Australia, which highlights concerns we share that the proposed legislative package will undermine existing rights and protections, including for women, people with a disability, sex and gender diverse people and people of minority faiths; and therefore, we cannot support these bills.

Faith-aligned institutions, 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.



Sacred Heart Mission engages a diverse range 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. We have no intention to do so in the future, regardless of changes in legislation.

Our organisation, services and shops are places of welcome.

We call on the Committee to recommend that the government deliver fair and equal anti-discrimination laws that protect all people from discrimination, regardless of who we are, what we believe, or who we love. Any legislation should serve to enhance the diverse and inclusive society we wish to live in.

As CEO of Sacred Heart Mission, I 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.

Our laws should protect all of us, equally.

Sincerely

Cathy Humphrey
Chief Executive Officer
Sacred Heart Mission