

Dear committee of inquiry,

I wish to provide a submission to the enquiry on freedom of religion or belief. Since 1999, the last time the committee enquired into this topic, there has been a great deal of state and territory legislation passed which erodes freedom of religion, and I would like to draw the committee's attention to the effect on the health and counselling sectors, in particular.

Firstly, the right to conscientious objection on religious grounds for health care professionals is seriously impacted by state abortion laws. For example, Section 8 of the Victorian Abortion Law Reform Act and Section 7 of the Tasmanian Reproductive Health (Access to Terminations) Act require doctors to refer a patient to another practitioner if they have a conscientious objection to abortion. But this only forces them to be complicit in facilitating the murder of a defenceless baby under the threat of being struck off and losing their livelihood if they don't comply.

Secondly, in Victoria, the Health Complaints Act 2016 makes it all but impossible to offer help to those struggling with unwanted temptation to commit homosexual sin. There can be no doubt about the intent of this legislation, because the Victorian Health Minister, Jill Hennessy, in her speech introducing the Bill said that it would eliminate the "abhorrent" counselling for individuals seeking help for unwanted same-sex attraction. Again, this denies freedom of religion to counsellors, who are now threatened with stiff penalties if they even attempt to acknowledge and act upon the truth that homosexual acts are sinful and damaging to those who practise them.

I am greatly concerned because recent trends suggest that these type of laws will spread to other states and territories and that persecution in the courts of those who seek to maintain their freedom of religion will only intensify.

Please do what you can to report on this growing threat to freedom of religion and belief in Australia and suggest recommendations to stop it.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Anne O'Dwyer

The following 26 people submitted versions of a Form Letter which were identical or substantially similar to Form Letter 3.

Anne O'Dwyer
Marilyn Rowsome
Ben & Ariel Drew
Patricia Leung
Jeanette McHardy
Geoff Earl
Fons & Bronwyn Janssen
Giulio di Somma
Glenrae Barker
Michael & Jillian Irwin
Robert Gallo
Trudi & Aiman Aiashi
Joanne Di Lorenzo

Rob Evans
Barry & Anne Mulquin
Stephen & Carol Porter
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Jeremy Orchard