



Submission in the federal Select Committee on Migration Amendment Bill 2024

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Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Committee Secretariat

The Justice and Peace Office is an agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, charged with promoting awareness, understanding and action in relation to justice, peace, ecology, and development as guided by Catholic Social Teaching. It is our commitment to Catholic Social Teaching that demands we write to oppose this cruel legislation.

The Catholic church has a long and deep commitment to the care of families and the integrity of the family. For that reason we are appalled that the Labor government would even consider passing legislation that would permanently separate people from their families and communities in Australia, preventing them from ever returning to their homes. This must not be allowed to happen.

This legislation could impact and devastate the lives of thousands of mums, dads and families, not just those affected by recent High Court decisions. Those include the people seeking ministerial intervention, all those transferred from Nauru and PNG, and families on Bridging Visas.

The legislation increases the risks of sending refugees and people seeking protection back to countries where they face persecution, including people who have been through awed and unfair legal processes. As a former journalist with The Australian Financial Review (AFR) I wrote several articles about young people being refouled and being murdered as a consequence of this refoulment. We cannot let Australia slip back to those dark days when the politics of border protection and gaining an electoral advantage became more important than the lives of young people seeking protection and Australia's reputation as a law-abiding international citizen. This legislation brings us back to that precipice again and must not be allowed to pass.

Finally, the fact that the bill attempts to indemnify the government from being sued for any actions taken to facilitate the removal of a person from Australia or their treatment in a third country sends a chilling message about the kind of treatment people receive in both Australia's offshore detention regime and when the private contractors attempt to remove people. This is not who we are as a people. We do not indemnify the government in order that the state or its private contractors get immunity when they cause hurt, damage and abuse – all of which has been established in immigration detention centres since 2001.

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There is no doubt Australia's immigration policy and practice is a brutal, ad hoc arrangement of deterrence through violence and extraordinary amounts of taxpayer funds being used to prop up this shambolic state.

Far from introducing more legislation that will further erode trust in government, Australia's international obligations and the lives of families and children, we propose it is time for a Royal Commission into immigration detention. It is time to retrace our steps as a nation and recover our capacity, skills and reputation as a nation capable of managing our borders, of regularising pathways to protection, and being once again an example of what a caring, smart and ambitious country does to maintain human rights and the dignity of all.

We commend this submission to your inquiry. Dr. Julie Macken, Justice & Peace Facilitator. Sydney Archdiocese, on behalf of the Justice & Peace Office Sydney Archdiocese.

Dr. Julie Macken

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