

Dear Senate Committee

I write to the *Senate Enquiry into the ACT Health Infrastructure Enabling Bill 2023* to express my concern about the ACT Government's hostile and forcible take-over of Calvary Hospital, and I understand your Senate Committee is enquiring into the process by which the '*Health Infrastructure Enabling Bill 2023*' was created, tabled and passed in [indeed rammed through!] the ACT Legislative Assembly.

I am dismayed that this Bill was constructed, tabled and passed with essentially no advance disclosure, serious public consultation, or realistic parliamentary debate. The Bill seems to be an ideological expression by a government who cannot abide any health or private establishment operating in a manner that does not suit its ideology. No government of any colour or persuasion should be functioning in this way in a democratic society. Where does this go next? Let me explain why this precedent is anathema to me and my family.

I lived in the ACT from 1972 to 2007, having worked for the Commonwealth Government for a total of 35 years. I left the Territory only because of a fundamental change to my life following the death of my wife in 2005. My children attended O'Connor Christian School, now renamed Brindabella Christian College, where my wife was bursar during its inaugural years. She eventually became Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT until shortly before her passing. The boys progressed through Daramalan (Catholic) College, and finally, Radford (Anglican-run) College. Our lives were, and are based on Christian principals and values, and we have enjoyed the quality services provided by both government and non-government institutions across the ACT. Successive Commonwealth Governments, including the current one, have acknowledged the value and importance of Christian and other non-governments schools across the country. As a family we attended Calvary Hospital on numerous occasions, and my wife spent many of her last weeks being cared for at the lovely hospice, Clare Holland House. The caring and dedicated service provided by that facility led me one day to ask how the facility manages to acquire so many caring and loving staff. The answer was that 'people like us naturally gravitate to such facilities as this'. These are people who are natural carers.

Many teachers and support staff seek to work in Catholic and other non-government schools because they are in tune with the ethos and underpinnings of those schools. In the same way, nurses, doctors and other ancillary staff gravitate towards private medical facilities such as Calvary Hospital and Clare Holland House. The fact that such facilities operate in a particular way, always under the authority and oversight of the government of

the day, means that lifestyle choices, personal values and religious convictions can live and work in a compatible environment. How does a government of any persuasion have the right to march in and simply take over?

As I understand the reasoning behind this take-over, under the guise of attacking operational inefficiencies in the ACT Health Service, the ACT Government set out to prevent Calvary Hospital from expressing the conscience-based turning away of people who come for legal abortions or transgender procedures, and eventually euthanasia/assisted suicide. They may say otherwise, but this seems to be the nub of the matter. Whatever the underlying reason, this is an unconscionable assault on freedom of speech and action, and I ask again – what comes next? Schools? Churches? Private clinics? Will they next set their sights on the likes of Daramalan College, Radford College and the Canberra Grammar Schools and equivalent Catholic Schools etc) and subsume them into the government system? All in the name of operational efficiency. This precedent gives reason for deep fear of what the government (any government, using this precedent) will do next.

Finally, I join many others in asking you to support and promote the '*Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Amendment Bill 2023*', which will require the ACT Government to order a (hopefully independent) enquiry into the 'mandatory acquisition of the Calvary Hospital'. Within your Terms of Reference, I ask you to condemn the actions this government has taken in literally stealing a hospital, its staff and resources, without consultation, negotiation or due compensation – and backed by threats of Police action. With this unbelievable over-reach the ACT Government has offended, hurt and dismayed, not only Canberrans, but fair-minded citizens across the nation. This is indeed a dangerous precedent which could have ramifications across the nation as other governments see how easy it is to surreptitiously, secretly and dishonestly promote their ideological agendas. This was supposed to be a democratic society and country.

Yours faithfully  
Russell Hill