



**CHALLENGE
INJUSTICE.**

24 November 2021

Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash
Attorney-General
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Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Senator Cash,

RE: Religious Discrimination Bill

I am writing to you on behalf of Amnesty International supporters around Australia regarding the soon to be introduced Religious Discrimination Bill. As it stands, the Bill threatens to wind back hard fought protections for LGBTQIA+ people, women, people with disabilities and even other people of faith by allowing people to use religion to discriminate against others.

Australia has an international legal obligation to take 'all appropriate measures' to prevent intolerance on the basis of religion or belief. Religious freedom is not separate from LGBTQIA+ rights, and many LGBTQIA+ people are people of faith who consider their right to religious and spiritual beliefs to be vitally important. Yet this bill has the potential to increase intolerance and give license to religious groups to use their beliefs to condemn and attack groups in the community.

The Religious Discrimination Bill provides protection and preferential treatment to religious beliefs or activities at the expense of other fundamental human rights. Amnesty is concerned that if the Bill is passed, it would create significant additional barriers for LGBTQIA+ people, women, people with disabilities, and other people of faith. The Bill will endanger these groups' access to essential services such as health, education, accommodation, aged care and compromise safe and inclusive workplaces.

If the Bill is passed in its current form, Australians will lose discrimination protections at work, school, in healthcare and when accessing goods and services, as people will be able to make discriminatory statements against them based on religious belief. Employees, students and others relying on services provided by faith-based organisations will have little protection if their beliefs differ from those of the organisation. Additionally, bodies regulating professionals will find it harder to enforce standards which make their professions and industries safe and inclusive for all.

This is complex legislation and unlike any other anti-discrimination legislation, undermines existing discrimination protections. As such, it needs proper consideration. Yet the current text of the Bill has not received sufficient scrutiny. Members of parliament should have an opportunity to hear from their constituents who will be directly affected by the Bill, and properly consider their position, before any vote.

People of faith must be protected against discrimination, vilification, and persecution based on their religious beliefs. Yet this Bill privileges religious belief over other human rights, flipping anti-discrimination law on its head. Rights to freedom of religion and other fundamental rights must

be protected and appropriately balanced. The rights of one group cannot come at the expense of the rights of others.

We urge the government to stand up for an inclusive Australia and pass laws that protect all of us equally, not support those that create new forms of discrimination.

We ask you to recommend that the bill be sent to a joint parliamentary inquiry, for proper consideration and consultation, before any vote takes place.

For further information, or to discuss and organise a meeting, please contact Ry Atkinson at 0423 270 124 or ry.atkinson@amnesty.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SKlintworth', written in a cursive style.

Sam Klintworth
National Director
Amnesty International Australia