



21 December 2021

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
PO Box 6100,
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: religionbills@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 and related bills ('the Bill')

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the Bill.

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) is Queensland's peak body for the social service sector. Our vision is to achieve equality, opportunity, and wellbeing for every person, in every community.

In responding to the Committee's inquiry, QCOSS consulted with our Women's Equality Network, which has 20 member organisations. The organisations are based across Queensland, some faith-based and others secular. These organisations engage with women through services such as community health, domestic violence prevention and parenting programs.

The objects of the Bill are to eliminate discrimination against people on the ground of religious belief or activity in key areas of public life, ensure protection of the right to equality before the law, promote recognition and acceptance of religious beliefs and ensure that people can make statements of belief.

QCOSS supports the proper protection of the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and non-discrimination based on religion.

However, our view is that the Bill does not properly reflect the circumstances where human rights should be limited, including when people may be harmed by statements of belief.

The Bill allows for statements of belief 'in good faith'. Good faith is broadly defined and could result in harmful malicious, harassing, threatening, intimidating and violent statements to be justified as a statement of belief. Examples could include:

- A woman who would like to apply for a leadership role in her workplace but is contending with an environment in which an influential manager is telling their peers that he believes that women should be subservient to men.
- A single mother who is told by her landlord that he believes marriage is for life and that her former partner has rights to her.

- A survivor of domestic violence who has to sit next to a co-worker who expresses the belief that women should not be able to refuse their husband's demands for sex within a marriage.
- A young woman who wants to report a sexual assault but knows that the local police sergeant in her rural community believes that women who drink alcohol in public have sinned.¹

Statements of belief that would otherwise be discriminatory could be permitted due to the operation of the Bill. This would prevent otherwise legitimate discrimination complaints being successful, including in areas of employment and education.

It is also likely that the Bill would result in people being refused access to essential services. The Bill allows for faith-based hospitals, aged care facilities, accommodation providers and disability service providers to discriminate against people with different or no religious beliefs in employment, and in service delivery. Services can be refused regardless of whether religion has little relevance to the service provided, services are government funded, and/or the organisation is the dominant or only provider of a service in a locality.

Due to our concerns outlined above, QCOSS does not support the passage of the Bill in its current form.

We support the call of the Australian Council of Social Service to introduce and implement a federal Human Rights Act. Among other things, this would provide better protection of the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and non-discrimination based on religion and allow for legitimate limitations to these rights.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Aimee McVeigh
Chief Executive Officer

¹ Equality Rights Alliance. Religious Discrimination Bill 2021: Fact Sheet.
<https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/publications/fact-sheet-religious-discrimination-bill-2021/>