

**Submission
No 97**

**ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT (RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS AND
EQUALITY) BILL 2020**

Name: Phil and Michelle Holmden

Date Received: 21 August 2020

Dear Committee

As you oversee the review of the Religious Discrimination Bill in NSW, we implore you to consider democratic freedom and protection for people of faith.

Of utmost importance to us as Christians is our freedom to speak, worship, educate our children in our faith, work, operate our business and to do so without fear. Having lived our entire lives in a democracy, we appreciate the freedoms that we have enjoyed. We watch the persecution of Christians in many countries around the world, we don't expect to face persecution for our belief in Australia, a country founded on Judeo Christian beliefs.

When the 2017 Marriage Equality vote was taken we were with the 40% of people who voted NO. Our faith determines everything we do and say. We believe that all Australians should have the right to state their opinion and if that is based on their belief then so be it. I do not agree with the opinions of the LGBTQI community but I realise that they have a right to voice them. Since the vote however, if we state our long held beliefs, we may now be told that we are conducting "hate speech". We voted NO because of our beliefs and now the legalisation of same sex marriage has brought about so many other restrictions. We are no longer supposed to teach our children according to our faith that God made male and female, marriage is between a man and a woman, or anything to do with traditional family. The legalisation of same sex marriage has swept away our freedom to express our faith freely.

The religious freedom of Australian Christians has never been more threatened. The treatment of Israel Folau has been outrageous. A clear case of an employer exercising discrimination against Christians. It seems as though Australia wants inclusion as long as it isn't anyone of Christian faith. We truly believe that Christians are the most persecuted religion in this country today.

We would like to see protections for Christian Schools. It is of the utmost importance that they be able to operate according to Christian doctrine. How will they be protected in the face of someone of an opposing belief system claiming vilification? We refer to the Archbishop Porteous case. Pretty much anyone could make a discrimination claim just because they are offended by what someone has said that disagrees with what they believe.

We do not believe that Courts should have the power to decide what religious beliefs are reasonable. Or what determines "religious activity". As committed Christians, daily we speak about Jesus, he isn't something we just "pull out of the box" on Sunday. So any debate or conversation we have may involve quoting scripture or why we believe or what we believe. We want to continue to have the right to freely speak as believers. A situation where government decides what people can or can't say is no longer a democracy. A country where others can scream that I don't have the right to say something is no longer a democracy. The old saying "I may not agree with what

you're saying but I will fight to the death your right to say it" defines freedom and free speech.

Daily we all need to determine our actions. Plainly this involves discrimination of some kind. Discrimination has become a dirty word in today's world but we all discriminate what is right and wrong according to what we believe on a daily basis. Which discrimination bill will be upheld over another? If my faith says that marriage should only be between a man and a woman, I should be free to discriminate that I don't want to be involved in a same sex marriage, as a baker, caterer, pastor, celebrant or whatever. Otherwise if I cannot live by what I believe, then I'm not free, am I? However, currently if I "discriminate" that I don't want to be involved, I can be prosecuted, lose my job, etc.

Please overhaul this bill so that it really does protect people of faith and demonstrate that a democracy enables those protections.

Yours sincerely

Phil & Michelle Holmden

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