

**Submission
No 132**

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

Name: Sue Hetherington

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I support Mark Latham's *Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Freedom Equality) Bill 2020* because it gives clarity to all Australians as to how people of faith in NSW are protected in their opinions, jobs and livelihoods.

In 2017, at the time of gay marriage voting, people of faith were being discriminated against publicly, often cited in the popular press. At this time, in our local community, the staging of a long held community event was put under scrutiny. The event was the saying of the Rosary in a public place, an event held internationally, and observed annually, over many years, in our village.

The procedure was to contact the local Council, speaking to the same person every year, who then "booked" the space, thereby giving community members access to the beachfront park, opposite the small Catholic Church. But the procedure was different in 2017. Council was contacted, but there was no response until days close the event. There was little time to publicise the event. The response from Council was that the park was "booked" by a large motorcycle group and they would have to be worked around. This is one example of Council not having clarity as to whether a local faith based group had the legal right to gather in a public place and the faith based group having no understanding of their legal rights as Australian citizens. This example is addressed in Division 1, 22L of the Bill.

Over many years, I have had responsibility for the students, staff and families in many Catholic primary and secondary schools in my roles as part of a Catholic Diocesan office. I have seen how students develop academically and spiritually, in a consistent faith-based climate. Our children attended Catholic schools; often with some financial hardship to us. The ethos of faith-based schools is paramount to their success and the Bill supports this tenet by stating that teachers who share the same faith in word and action produce students who emulate what they see in their teachers every day.

In the 1950's, prior to Government funding for Catholic schools, education was divided between the colloquially termed "Catholics" and the "Publics", resulting in many afternoon fistfights when local students left their school buses. This divide carried over into employment, with people of faith not being considered for jobs because of their beliefs. This was the time when today's large Catholic institutions began, principally to provide employment for those of faith. Faith should not have been an impediment to employment, yet it still is in 2020. This anomaly is addressed in Division 2, 22N of the Bill.

For many people COVID-19 has changed the workplace to their home. For many, this reality has been life changing. Many see the value and benefits of being with family and connecting with community. Estimating the home and work balance has changed for the better for Australian communities. The Israel Folau court case articulated that employers expect their employees to represent the company wholly, both in work hours and in their private lives. This does not sit with the new reality born of COVID-19. The recognition of the dignity of each Australian in living their faith is addressed in Division 2, 22S of the Bill.

Australia is described as one of the most tolerant nations on earth, yet there are numerous examples of attempts to redefine the Bible and destroy the reputations of high profile people of faith. I endorse this Bill so that all may be treated equally and Australian society will flourish.

Yours sincerely

Sue Hetherington.