

Thank the Attorney General and the Government for their work to secure religious freedom in Australia in proposed Religious Discrimination Bill 2019. Religious people and organisations, including Christian churches, make an enormous contribution to the good of Australian society.

We are concerned that attempts to protect freedom of religion by codification may prove counter-productive and urge the Government to allow maximal freedom with minimal regulation. We urge the Government to continue to improve the proposed legislation so that it best secures freedom of religion.

We raise the following concerns about the exposure draft.

- 1) It is not clear that religious organisations who do not require employees to share their religious convictions will be able to prefer employees who share those convictions. This may inhibit the ministry of our schools, pre-schools, aged care facilities and hospitals.
- 2) Similarly, the definition of religious bodies may exclude schools, pre-schools, aged care facilities and hospitals, all of which we consider to be expressions of our ministry in Christ's name.
- 3) It is not clear that the legislation would protect good faith expressions of moral teaching (such as on matters of sexuality, gender and marriage) which some might claim to be "vilification".
- 4) The provision for employers to limit expression of opinion by employees on the basis of "unjustifiable financial hardship to the employer" seems to open the way for powerful commercial interests to censor reasonable private expressions.