

Media Release



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Christian Schools Applaud Long Overdue Protections

Christian schools in New South Wales welcomed the announcement by Attorney General Mark Speakman that religious discrimination will be outlawed in NSW.

“Religious freedom is a fundamental human right, given the highest protection in international law,” said CSA Director of Public Policy, Mark Spencer, “the absence of protection for religious freedom was a gaping hole in NSW anti-discrimination law.”

“We agree with the NSW Attorney-General that protection of religious freedom reflects ‘modern community values’, but more deeply, it reflects protection of a human right recognised over the centuries and fundamental to the very core of human dignity.”

The High Court of Australia has described religious freedom as “the paradigm freedom of conscience” and the “essence of a free society,” (*Church of the New Faith v Commissioner for Pay-Roll Tax* (1983) 154 CLR 120,130). In international law, freedom of religion is protected by Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which importantly protects not only the right to hold a belief, but to act in accordance with that belief.

Numerous reviews and inquiries have highlighted the need for better protection for religious freedom in Australia. The Expert Panel Report: Religious Freedom Review (the “Ruddock review”) in 2018 clearly recommending that NSW should amend its anti-discrimination law to protect against discrimination on religious grounds.

“The recommendations from the *Joint Select Committee on the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Freedoms and Equality) Bill 2020* provide a clear framework for the Government’s legislation to follow,” said Mr Spencer, “Christian schools and their communities across NSW will be looking to the Government to at least meet the standards in those recommendations.”

“We agree that passage of NSW protections before Federal legislation is introduced would be unwise,” he said, “but the NSW Government can certainly release legislation based on the clear framework provided by the Committee’s recommendations at the same time as the Federal legislation.”

“We expect that opponents of the legislation will again raise a serious of straw-man arguments, but we agree with the Government, ‘religious discrimination is unacceptable in our community’.”

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For all media enquiries:

Mark Spencer, Director of Public Policy
[mspencer@csa.edu.au](mailto:m Spencer@csa.edu.au) | 0419 419 224

About Christian Schools Australia

Christian Schools Australia is the largest association of Christian schools in the country and has member schools educating over 70,000 students and employing nearly 10,000 staff at 170 locations across Australia. CSA is part of the global ACSI network of 24,000 schools educating in excess of 5.5 million students in over 108 countries world-wide.

