

Media Release



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Polling Supports Religious Freedom – Does Parliament?

Christian Schools Australia were amongst the range of faith-based groups and legal academic providing evidence to the Senate Legal and Constitution Affairs Committee in Canberra today.

The review of the Religious Discrimination Bill and associated bills by the Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee is the second review of the third iteration of this legislative package. It comes on top of the extensive independent review undertaken by the Expert Panel on Religious Freedom and more than two decades of reviews across the nation going to back to least 1998.

“Religious freedom must be the most analysed and reviewed human right in this country,” said Mark Spencer of Christian Schools Australia in his opening statement to the Committee, “as far back as 1998 the then Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission recommended a federal Religious Freedom Act.”

“Over that time polling has shown strong support for religious freedom, with independent private polling* we commissioned last year demonstrating the widespread support for the Bill’s protections - **more than 2 out of 3 Australians** believing that Australian laws should uphold and protect the universal human right to hold **and practice** religious beliefs.”

“That polling also showed the overwhelming support for faith-based schools, with **79% of Australians supporting the right of religious schools to employ teachers and other staff who support the values and beliefs of the school**, if those values and beliefs are clearly stated. This is a key element of the Bill and a vital protection for Christian schools,” he told the Committee.

“As indicated in our submission, some of the claims against the bills in fact demonstrate its fairness and focus merely on protecting religious belief and the manifestation of that belief.”

“The bills before the Committee not only have wide ranging support across the community, but also across faith communities,” he said, “and in the end the Committee has a very simple question to answer – do you support religious freedom or not?”

Christian Schools Australia lodged a joint submission with Adventist Schools Australia to the Senate Committee.

ENDS

* Independent national polling of a weighted representative sample of 1515 Australians undertaken from 19 October 2021.

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About Christian Schools Australia

Christian Schools Australia is the largest association of Christian schools in the country and has member schools educating around 72,000 students and employing more than 10,000 staff at more than 180 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.