



3 December 2021

Federal Protections for Religious Freedom Needed More Than Ever

The passage later this afternoon of the *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Bill 2021* through the Victorian Parliament demonstrates why the Commonwealth's Religious Discrimination Bill is absolutely critical for people of faith.

'The Victorian Government has introduced the greatest burden on religious freedom of any government in Australia,' said Mark Spencer, Director of Public Policy for Christian Schools Australia, 'a burden described rightly in the debate in the Legislative Council as "so narrow as to be non-existent in practical application".' [Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:04)]

'We agree that the amendments "show a fundamental misunderstanding of education and schools", the true nature of which was wonderfully captured by Mrs McArthur when she indicated –

"A school is not the simple sum of every maths teacher plus every science teacher plus every geography teacher, the product of subject knowledge they impart in every individual lesson. This is a depressingly reductive view. ... The character and culture of a school comes from its customs, traditions and values, from the personalities, interests and values of its teachers and its pupils, and often from its long history. This is what parents want".' [Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:33)]

The United Nations Human Rights Committee has made clear that(emphasis added) –

*"... the practice and teaching of religion or belief includes acts integral to the conduct by religious groups of their basic affairs, such as **freedom to choose their religious leaders, priests and teachers, the freedom to establish seminaries or religious schools** and the freedom to prepare and distribute religious texts or publications."*[General Comment 22]

'The Bill passed today fundamentally attacks the rights of parents and people of faith to operate schools and religious bodies, rights clearly protected in international law,' Mr Spencer said.

'In the Government's own words, the Bill will affect the employment of 'priests, ministers, rabbis, imams or other members of a religious order' – going to the heart of faith communities.'

'If there was any doubt as to why the Commonwealth's Religious Discrimination Bill was sorely needed, that was erased today,' said Mr Spencer.

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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 over 70,000 students and employing more than 10,000 staff at 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.

