

## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Plea for action as support grows for religious freedom laws

**EXCLUSIVE**By **JESS MALCOLM**, EXCLUSIVE6:29PM NOVEMBER 10, 2022 •  4 COMMENTS

Growing support has emerged for religious freedom laws in Australia, sparking calls for Anthony Albanese to legislate protections against faith-based discrimination.

A national poll commissioned by a coalition of Christian schools, which includes the Australian Association of Christian Schools, Associated Christian Schools and Christian Schools Australia, found 75 per cent of respondents supported the right of a religious school to employ teachers who support stated values and beliefs of the schools.

The polling, conducted between October 24 and 26, found more than two thirds of respondents believed Australian laws should protect the right to hold and practice religious beliefs.

The research also found 86 per cent support the right of parents to choose a school that reflects their strongly held values and beliefs. The polling was conducted on a sample of respondents with a broad spectrum of political affiliations, including Labor, Liberal, Nationals, Greens and independent voters.

Religious discrimination legislation providing protections for faith groups and individuals is expected to return to the parliament next year, after Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus set an April deadline for an Australian Law Reform Commission review into exemptions for education institutions.

Australian Association of Christian Schools executive officer Vanessa Cheng called for the government to implement legislation with “fair protections”, arguing schools should be free to

employ staff without fear of having to defend themselves against costly discrimination claims.

Ms Cheng said the recent high-profile ousting of Essendon chief executive Andrew Thornburn highlighted the need to implement legal protections for religious people.

“These results show the overwhelming support religious schools have across the Australian community to employ people who share the same values and beliefs,” Ms Cheng said.

“The high-profile Andrew Thornburn case proves that people of faith do experience religious discrimination and it is overdue for this fundamental human right to be protected in Australian law.”

Christian Schools Association public policy director Mark Spencer said laws should protect the rights of people to practise religion and urged all federal parliamentarians to pass legislation with “strong” protections for Christian schools.

“Support is growing for protections ensuring Christian schools can chose staff who share their beliefs, and parents recognise that this may require staff to move to another school if they no longer share those beliefs,” he said.

The independent national research was completed by Compass Polling on behalf of the Australian Christian Schools Alliance using a national weighted sample of 1701.

#### **JESS MALCOLM, REPORTER**

Jess Malcolm is a political reporter in The Australian’s Canberra bureau, where she covers a range of rounds including agriculture, infrastructure and regional affairs. She won the Student Journalist of the Yea... [Read more](#)

