



## **Media Release: Inquiry reports offer no clear pathway to friendless and divisive Religious Discrimination Bill**

**4 February 2022** - National LGBTIQ+ organisation, Equality Australia, today said the Morrison Government must scrap its flawed religious discrimination reforms, as two separate parliamentary inquiries criticise key aspects of the proposed legislation and fail to solve the wide-ranging problems with the Religious Discrimination Bill.

In two reports documenting broad opposition among religious, health, women's, civil society, LGBTIQ+, disability, business groups and unions, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights and Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee have each criticised key aspects of the legislation yet failed to agree on the way forward, leaving many of the concerns unaddressed and committee members from across the political divide departing from committee recommendations in additional comments.

"After three years of trying to solve a problem of the Government's making, the committees were left with the pieces of a broken and friendless bill. It's no wonder they failed to find a way to fix it. It is time to throw out this failed, experimental bill," said **Anna Brown, CEO of Equality Australia**.

"The Government must scrap the Bill and instead do what everyone has been telling it to do for three years: protect all of us, equally. Protect people of faith from discrimination by lifting the standards for all of us, without eroding protections for women, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and even people of faith."

Additional comments made to both reports by Liberal, Labor and Greens members of parliament highlighted the division across the parliament and unresolved problems with the reform package, including:

- clauses that wind-back existing discrimination protections for women, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and even people of faith,
- legal gaps that allow discrimination against LGBTQ+ teachers and students in religious schools, and
- unintended consequences of the bill for employers, in home aged care and bodies regulating professionals, such as doctors, teachers and lawyers.

In particular, the Senate committee, reinforced by separate comments from Liberal, Labor and Greens members, raised concerns with a clause that enabled discriminatory statements to be made in workplaces, schools or service settings based on religion.

Equality Australia has pointed to the example of Citipointe Christian School's controversial 'enrolment contract' as an example of the type of practice the Bill would invite en masse in faith-based organisations, including schools, aged care and disability services and hospitals across the country.

"The Citipointe example this week shows what is to come if the Religious Discrimination Bill is passed as proposed. Religious schools and other organisations will be empowered to force their



employees, students and their parents to sign contracts agreeing to beliefs that contradict their own in order to keep their jobs or get an education.”

“Of course people of faith should be protected from discrimination. But as the evidence outlined in the committee reports show, these laws would instead take the country backwards, winding back hard-fought protections for women, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and people of faith, and undermining safe and inclusive schools and workplaces,” added Ms Brown.

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