Submission Form
Date of Submission: 26 Sep 2019
Your details Organisation Name: Carnegie Church of Christ

I submit to you the following points for consideration.

1. Religious freedoms are for all people of faith - and encompasses the broad base of belief reflected in our communities (Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist, etc).

2. Religious freedom means that I can hold a religious conviction around a topic, practise or principle that is contrary to mainstream societal views – and I should be permitted to do so without fear of penalty or recriminations for holding that view, not because I am exempted by the good graces of the government but because religious freedoms are upheld as a fundamental right of the individual. To exempt me, implies a negative – as if I am deficient, or my position is lacking. And the government will then, for charitable reasons, provide me special exemptions. Religious freedoms should be celebrated and upheld by government and laws and couched in ‘positive discrimination’ laws. If we’re honest, we apply positive discrimination in all walks of life – from whom we reject for a bank loan to whom we reject as our baby-sitter. Discrimination is often times viewed in the negative, but in and of itself is one of the reasons that we actually function as a society.

3. People do not have a fundamental right to "not be offended" simply because they hold a contrary view to my religious view.

4. Speech should indeed be "free" and unhindered by repressive laws – whether in the spheres of politics, scientific research, medical academia, arts and culture, religion.

5. The mark of a mature society is that ideas can be debated respectfully by those that disagree with each other. They can be rejected or they can be accepted or they can be ignored. A person holding dissenting positions should not be forced to take their ideas or views "underground" – simply because people find them offensive. Additionally, workplaces should not be allowed to demand what you can and cannot say with regards to your religious convictions if those convictions have nothing to do with workplace activities or obligations. To shut down free speech this way and vexatiously label all dissenting views as "hate speech" accompanied by punitive actions, is the slow march to totalitarianism as we mandate people's speech and behaviour as either "in" or "out". In the free market of ideas, let the ideas be heard, even if they are offensive to some.

6. Incitement to do harm or commit illegal acts obviously should be dealt with appropriately under existing laws.

7. Free speech (the ventilation of ideas) and my point 6 should not be conflated by appealing to ‘hate speech’ as a justification to punish the individual or group.
8. Religious freedom means that a faith based organisation (school, university, church, charity, social enterprise) can positively discriminate towards employing a candidate that best presents a personal alignment with that organisation’s religious philosophy, principles and ethos. There should be no penalty for discriminating against a person who rejects or refuses the religious philosophy, principles or ethos – yet demands the right to work there. Simple common-sense, reason and logic, support the idea that any ‘values-based’ institution, whether a political party, union, charity, religion, etc., would positively discriminate towards those hires who exhibit a ‘like’ minded and unifying set of values. Example, in question - to force or coerce a Liberal MP’s office to hire a Green’s oriented staffer, a person who was clearly holding hostile political views, would seem simply absurd.

9. Religious freedom means that I do not have to be compelled to provide a product or a service that forces me to violate my conscience – whether a ‘same-sex’ marriage ceremony or a baked cake carrying LGBT slogans (it is of some interest that the US Supreme Court upheld the rights of the Christian baker in the 2018 case that he, Jack Phillips, should not be forced or coerced to violate his religious convictions and produce a product that violated those convictions). A person providing a product or service, should not be forced or compelled by the State to violate their conscience, ever.

10. While the LGBT community equate their sexual identity as being the same as race or gender (meaning they’re born that way and there is no choice in the matter), they demand ‘gay rights’ as ‘civil rights’. Yet the truth is, deep divisions exist within their own camp around this line of argument. There is no ‘gay gene’ as expressed by homosexual activist Peter Tatchell. He writes, “If heterosexuality and homosexuality are, indeed, genetically predetermined (and therefore mutually exclusive and unchangeable), how do we explain bisexuality or people who, suddenly in mid-life, switch from heterosexuality to homosexuality (or vice versa)? We can’t. The reality is that queer and straight desires are far more ambiguous, blurred and overlapping than any theory of genetic causality can allow.” – I mention this in response to the often ventilated ‘truth’ that ‘gay people are born that way.’ It’s simply not that simple. It is not well publicised, but gay people do leave the queer community and ‘go straight’ (they are often demonised by the LGBT community for doing so).

11. The Christian faith has much to say about sexuality and indeed about sexual practises – which of course attracts the ire of those in communities that run counter to the biblical teachings. While we are called as Christians to love all people equally, our Christian theology is defined solely by the bible and not by dissenting or aggrieved individuals, groups or government law. Religious freedoms should allow Christians to uphold the biblical view of traditional marriage and of biblical sexuality and we should be able to articulate those views – even if those views are counter to society and cause offense.

12. It’s worth noting that Jesus’ first words in the gospel of Mark are ‘Repent!’ Our culture has little idea of the nature of sin, nor what constitutes ‘sin.’ Religious freedom is the ability to teach the biblical position on sin – and even do this in the public square without fear of being fined or arrested because you happen to offend someone. Yet, this is what we’re seeing in western nations around the world. The bible is being termed ‘hate-speech’, church leaders are being warned about what they can and cannot say, people are losing their jobs and livelihoods, tenure contracts are being cancelled, businesses are forced into
closure, street preachers are being arrested and free-speech is being shut-down.

13. One religious person critiquing another’s religious view will invariably cause offence. All religions believe they are custodians of the ‘truth’ (I’m in that camp based on John 14:6). I’m not offended when my atheist friends call me ‘a fool’ or ‘blind’ or ‘weak’ because I believe in Jesus Christ and his cross. As a mature person, I welcome the debate and exchange of ideas. Yet, I’m often warned about standing up publicly and critiquing another religion (e.g. Islam) at the risk of some form of punitive action. So again, religious freedom would allow me the positive right to critique the ideas of others without fear of recriminations.

14. Religion should be viewed by the state as a positive contributor to society – from providing moral and ethical frameworks that support law and order, to the advancing of social justice and social welfare initiatives of the individual, to upholding the sanctity and dignity of all life, to providing care and charity to the poor and destitute of our communities, to operating hospitals, schools, orphanages, rehab centres and safe refuges. These are just a sampling of the works undertaken by religiously inspired communities – and while in all people groups, problems arise – it should be noted that those who inflict injuries on the vulnerable must in fact violate the very teachings they proport to uphold. This is often a forgotten fact.

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CHURCH OF CHRIST