Religious Discrimination Bill – Exposure Draft

Your Submission

Part 1: Introduction
Chairo is owned by an association of parents, and governed by association-elected directors on a governing board.

Part 2: Context
The five campuses operated by Chairo Christian School sit within the broader collective of Christian schools that have been established to provide an explicitly Christian environment for students and their families. These tend to be schools within the evangelical tradition of the Christian faith, and have a strong view of the authority of the Bible as central to life. Whilst our schools are subscribed to mainly by Christian families, families with non-Christian beliefs are also welcomed and enrolled.

All schools are founded on a faith – a belief in something. It may be a recognised religion (Muslim, Jewish, Christian) or an ideological position (secularist, Montesorri, humanist). That school will intentionally, or unintentionally, operate from that position of belief. This can be described as the why of the school’s existence.

This is both universal (i.e. not specific to any religion or ideology) and appropriate in a pluralistic society like Australia. It is an enriching party of our society, and founded on Australia’s recognition that religious and ideological freedom is a fundamental human right and accorded the highest possible protection.

All schools will also hold a stated or unstated purpose (mission) and direction (vision). This can be described as where the school sees itself moving. This may or may not be linked to their basis of belief, but is usually strongly driven by why they exist.

A school’s mission and direction will usually align closely with any stated values they hold, model, and commit to seeing lived out in the lives of those in that school community. These values, or ways of living, can be described as the how the community exist together and live out their beliefs or ideologies. Again, Australia is a richer country because of the inherent protection we have in international law to not just hold a belief, but express that belief.

Finally, the faith or belief (why), the purpose of the school (where) and the stated values and expectations of that community all shape what that community does in undertaking its core business – in the case of schools, that is the education of children.
Part 3: Submission

In light of this, we would strongly urge the government to:

1. Define and clarify religious activity in the Bill to include activities that are considered traditional expressions of a faith or religion (e.g. teaching from Scripture, undertaking traditional expressions of worship) as well as other expressions of faith or religion that may not be considered as traditional (e.g. holding a particular view of marriage).

2. Ensure the Bill has a mechanism to balance religious freedoms against other competing rights. For example, it is our understanding that the Ruddock Review sought to provide for this by recommending the incorporation of the Siracusa Principles.

3. Embed within the Bill the right for faith-based schools to clearly and unambiguously be able to proclaim and operate in accordance with their teachings (clause 41) and employ staff who share their beliefs (clause 10) without constraint.

Part 4: Summary

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a submission on how the exposure draft of the Religious Discrimination Bill might be strengthened to better meet the important needs of independent Christian schools.

The author of this submission is available to discuss these matters further as needed.