27th September, 2019

Cover letter to Religious Discrimination Commission 2019

PFLAG+
30 Helen St,
Newstead 4006

Dear Attorney General,

This submission is written on behalf of the parents of Australia with sons and daughters who identify as sexually and gender diverse.

For several years we have watched our children struggle with anxiety, uncertainty and feelings of being considered second rate. Many have suffered mental health issues and sadly many have suicided because life just became too difficult, especially with the marriage equality debate.

Now, anxiety rates are higher than ever with helplines being stretched to the limits, once again due to this debate about where they fit in their own country.

PFLAG did a Galaxy Poll recently that showed 2-3 people do not agree with the proposed religious discrimination of LGBTIQ people. However, the Poll did show that on 13% do agree.

If this discrimination is legalized only 13% benefit. And, their prize is the right to hate speech and the right to discriminate against those who Jesus would have supported.

This country already has religious freedom, we don’t need religious privilege just to appease fear mongers and the uninformed.

Shelley Argent OAM
National Spokesperson PFLAG+
RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BILL

Submission - PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS (PFLAG+)

Organisation type: 100% Voluntary - Peer Support Group

27th September, 2019

Parents with LGBTIQ loved ones believe the government is making a huge mistake by developing a Religious Discrimination Bill and specific religious discrimination Commissioner. We already have freedom of religion, but this proposed Bill will give many the belief they can insult and incite hatred under the guise of religious freedom. First, how, do you define a “Christian”? Is it only if they go to church? And, how often do they need to go to church to be a Christian? And, what are the other requirements necessary to be a Christian. I consider myself a Christian and I don’t go to church.

Then who is correct with their interpretation of the Bible? Many interpret the same chapters from the same bible in a variety of ways. Otherwise, why are many clergy supportive and others, not?

This Bill, I believe is only being produced because of prejudice by one group against another, with the intention to oppress, because they are in fear of losing their long held privilege. The problem is they have held privilege for so long they aren’t even aware they have it. Muslims and Jews are discriminated against more in this country than Christians. Christians can do and be whatever they like in this country. They only claim discrimination because they lost the marriage equality debate.

It is ludicrous to suggest the likes of Israel Foleau or anyone else should have the right to stand up publicly and be able to tell others they are going to hell, or they are sinners or whatever else he likes under the guise of being a Christian. Do you consider it to be like parliamentary privilege? If this is ok, what next? We have laws to govern the country, we have workplace laws and we have societal standards that keep us in order. However, using religion as an excuse to cause pain and stress on minorities negatively affected in the name of Jesus is abhorrent.

Additionally, it will increase hate crimes against our children. Australia is a secular country, the government is not the keeper of the moral code of its citizens. We are all individuals and we don’t want our religious next door neighbors being given the right to decide on our morals and beliefs.

PFLAG initiated a Galaxy Poll of 1000 heterosexuals in July that showed 68% did not believe that LGBTIQ people and others should be affected by religious reforms. When they voted for marriage equality, they didn’t vote for discrimination as a spin off. The Poll showed 2 out 3 polled do not agree with discrimination and only 13% Christians believed in religious discrimination. Fear mongering has ensued since same sex marriage was introduced. If the NO Campaign had won we would not be going through this process. Additionally, we have the exorbitant costs involved, just because a small number of Christians are unrealistically concerned about their freedoms. The postal survey cost the nation $120 million and now a Religious Discrimination Commissioner is going to cost $1.25 million per year for every year just to appease a few.
Previously all changes to the marriage act were part of parliamentary process, which would have cost zero dollars, but we had to have the postal survey to once again appease the Christians which cost $120 million. And, now we are told we need a Commission to protect the rights of fearful Christians. We have freedom of religion which is what is fair and right. However, this new Commission being planned will only create Religious Privilege.

The Bill is reportedly in part to protect religious charities but the definition needs to be defined as to what charities do. As an example the ACL claims a charitable status but describe themselves as an advocacy group.

There is huge concern for many groups that are government funded religious groups eg Centacare who pay minimal tax, will be able to refuse service and care to those who don't live accordingly with the organisation’s religious ethos. Before this was not an issue. However, now there is great concern among several groups that religious freedom will provide such groups the privilege to refuse service or care?

Since when has a charity become an exclusive club, heterosexual couples only, married once being the rule. A true Christian charity should tend to all who come for support not stand in judgement.

Regarding the overview of religious belief I believe is very broad and open to interpretation. I believe it can be interpreted any way that’s suits the complainant. Then, if someone disagrees this could be considered discrimination which leaves many people open to law suits.

I agree that there should be no direct or indirect discrimination in the work force. People regardless of religion, sexuality or gender should all be treated equally with dignity and respect.

Indirect discrimination or conscientious objection is an issue and once again open to interpretation. People can innocently expect service from any business only to be rejected which can be insulting and embarrassing. If this is to be allowed by government, clear signs should be visible stating this is the reality of the business or organisation. However, what is to happen if there is only one place in the vicinity and its life threatening?

Conduct of religious bodies is a huge concern. This again can be extremely restrictive to not only LGBTIQ people but women, single mothers, divorcees etc. it can begin to develop a “them and us” society instead of fair.

If people are permitted to discriminate on the grounds of religion; are those rejected permitted to refuse service to Christians? If not, this is religious privilege not freedom.

To me it’s offensive to couples and individuals regardless of sexuality or couples marrying more than once, to be refused service because the proprietor or manager doesn't agree with the customer’s moral code.
I believe this is a Bill that is particularly one sided. People of religion can refuse service of any kind to anyone that doesn't comply with their religious ethos or beliefs.

However an LGBTIQ person, divorcee, single mother etc I fear will not be permitted to refuse similar service to the individual or organisation who may have the right to refuse service to them, that is discrimination.

We keep hearing about the sword and the shield. In truth the shield is for the discriminators protection and the sword is to silence and discriminate against the oppressed.

The Bill is looking for ways to provide the shield for Christians from being accountable when using ,their words as a sword directed towards LGBTIQ people and others. This would be an issue in the workplace or in public areas where LGBTIQ married couples and others can be insulted without any recourse.

The Bill is clear that we cannot discriminate against people of religion and rightly so. Freedom of religion is one thing, privilege or a license to incite hatred is another issue, that is not ok. Where are the protections for LGBTIQ people? We have a Minister for Women, Disability, Indigenous, Aged Care and Immigration etc, but nothing for LGBTIQ, Why?

The Bill is intended for people of religion to have the freedom to speak freely without fear. The issue is what about those who feel this Bill will give them free rein to spread hate anywhere, anytime.

Suicide and depression will increase. Mental Health Centres for LGBTIQ people already have their services stretched due to anxiety caused by this Bill. Homophobic physical attacks and verbal abuse are increasing and the abuses will only increase.

Finally, I believe it’s abhorrent that a federal government would consider taking away a States’ right as in Tasmania. The government should work towards introducing the highest standards of ethics, not take a State to the lowest common denominator. The State has equality, but once again a few Christians dislike the idea of LGBTIQ people not being oppressed and that is their goal. Oppression of a minority.

Please take into consideration that LGBTIQ people work and contribute equally in our society. They are doctors, lawyers, police and in the defense forces the same as anyone else. LGBTIQ people do not deserve more or less than others.

Australia has a seat on the Human Rights Council in the UN where we are responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights around the Globe. Let’s not just talk about human rights let’s put into practice what we preach.

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National Spokesperson PFLAG+