

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, 24 February 2023 5:37 PM
To: Anti Discrimination Law
Subject: To strip religious schools of the right to maintain their ethos is entirely unreasonable

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Dear Australian Law Reform Commission,

I wish to make a submission to the inquiry into Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws.

I am alarmed that the principles in the ALRC consultation paper seek to attack the exemptions in the Sex Discrimination Act which are rightly afforded to religious schools so that they can maintain their identity and uphold their religious ethos.

For instance, point 1 of proposition B in the consultation paper states, "Religious educational institutions should not be allowed to discriminate against any staff (current or prospective) on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status, or pregnancy." Some examples of what this point implies are given in the paper itself as, "a school could no longer refuse to hire a teacher on the grounds that they are LGBTQ+" and "a university could not refuse to consider a lecturer's application for promotion because they were gay and in a same-sex relationship". These examples illustrate that religious schools could no longer reject the application of a prospective staff member or replace a current staff member who lives in a way which is completely opposed to the school's religious ethos.

But schools must be able to select and retain staff based on these grounds because "sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status, and pregnancy" can all, in certain circumstances, conflict with religious doctrines. Preventing religious schools from protecting their ethos will therefore destroy their foundations and hence their very existence – making them religious in name only.

Religious schools are highly valued by countless Australians – both genuine believers as well as those seeking to instil faith-based values in their children. Consequently, I believe that there is no justifiable reason to strip religious schools of the right to maintain their distinctiveness and unity. To do so is grossly unfair to the majority of Australia's population who are religious.

I therefore call upon the ALRC to reconsider its current stance and instead support the retention of religious schools' rightful exemptions in the Sex Discrimination Act. Australian families must continue to be able to enrol at schools of all different types, both religious and non-religious. Only by having such variety of schools available can we respect all Australians and represent our nation's true diversity.

Yours faithfully,

Linda Wilsdon

[REDACTED]