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MEDIA RELEASE

Vinnies says drop proposed changes to charity law

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has called on the Federal Government to drop proposed changes to governance standards which threaten to undermine the freedoms necessary for registered charities to conduct essential advocacy work.

In a submission to the Federal Treasury, National President Claire Victory said the suggested changes to governance standard three in the *Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission Regulation 2013* (which do not include an appeal or review process), are redundant, unnecessarily complex, and if implemented will increase burdensome red tape.

'The changes potentially stymie the right of our members to freedom of expression and opinion, and limit their right to participate in or organise a protest,' Ms Victory said.

'The amendment not only increases the type of unlawful activities covered by the standard, it introduces more legal 'grey areas' and creates greater uncertainty as to what constitutes unlawful activity that may affect registration.

'It is not clear why the expansion is needed, as registered entities must already comply with all applicable laws.

'The Australian Government's position fails to address the fact that substantial powers already lie with the ACNC and the Commissioner.

'Criminal law can be used to deal with instances where the law has been broken by a charity.

'We believe the Regulations do not require amendment and that the powers of the ACNC and Commissioner are sufficient to enable appropriate action to be taken should an alleged breach of law affect public trust and confidence, the assets of a charity or the public it serves.

'The Society satisfies the *Charities Act 2013* definition of charitable purpose by 'advancing public debate' when working towards achieving our charitable purposes.

'In doing so, we can promote or oppose a change to any matter of law, policy or practice, as long as this advocacy furthers or aids another charitable purpose,' Ms Victory said.

The National Council's submission to the Treasury is available [here](#).

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.

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