



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF DARWIN



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MEDIA RELEASE

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT BILL DISCRIMINATES AGAINST THOUSANDS OF TERRITORIANS

The NT Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill (Bill) is scheduled to go before Parliament next week. The Bill is set to drastically remove religious freedoms and upset the balance of human rights in the Northern Territory. The Bill is being met with grave concern by many faith-based groups, and on Saturday 19 November representatives of many diverse faith groups across the NT came together in unity to express their alarm and their hope that the NT Labor government will hear the concerns of many Territorians and maintain protection of religious freedoms as part of anti-discrimination reform.

Concern has also been expressed by faith leaders about the NT governments lack of genuine consultation with the faith community about the impact of changes made at the last minute. These changes drastically and unacceptably reduce the right of faith-based schools to employ staff based on their religious belief or activity.

The Catholic Diocese of Darwin, NT Christian Schools and other Faith based organisations subsequently made numerous attempts to engage and discuss crucial elements pertaining to the Bill with Parliamentarians.

At a radio interview with Katie Woolf (Mix 104.9FM) on Wednesday the 16th of November 2022, Bishop Charles Gauci, the Bishop of the Catholic Church in NT and President of Catholic Education NT expressed serious concerns and 'unintended consequences' as it gravely impacts all of Catholic Education NT's 18 colleges and schools which employs 1200 staff and around 5000 students.

'The very reason we have Faith Schools is that we can promote the ethos of that faith. It's about protecting the rights of those parents who want their children to be brought up in the values that they choose. So, it's a form of discrimination against those families by imposing on them a belief system that they don't want, so, in effect its reverse discrimination,' said Bishop Gauci.

'If we cannot have faith schools to be 'genuine faith schools' where its respectful of everybody, where we give people an idea of other people's beliefs in the society we live in, and have intellectual respect for values and ideas, if we cannot have that, then what's the point of having

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them? We will have to seriously consider closing them and then all the children will have to go to state schools' added Bishop Gauci.

"Like any organisation, our people define our culture. To provide a genuine faith-based education we **must** be able to employ staff who share our beliefs. It is deeply disappointing that the Northern Territory Government has shown a complete disregard for the fundamental human right of religious freedom and have ignored the serious concerns faith leaders have about this Bill." (Vanessa Cheng, Executive Officer, Australian Association of Christian Schools)

"In a Christian school religion is not taught as a separate subject once a week. Our schools teach all subjects through a Biblical worldview. Our faith informs every aspect of our life and the operation of our schools: the level of integration of faith and practice is so intimate that statements made by the Attorney General are simply incorrect." (Phoebe van Bentum, CEO, NT Christian Schools).

Bishop Charles met with the Attorney General on Thursday and will release in full his response letter to the Attorney General after the press conference.

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