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31 January 2020

Attorney-General's Department

Re: Religious Freedom Bills – Second Exposure Drafts

To whom it may concern

As our organisation works in the space of faith and sexuality, we are very aware of religious beliefs about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming (LGBTQ) individuals and the discrimination they can experience in a range of contexts particularly religious circles. The harm this causes is well documented and has been for several decades.

Our organisation and website promote understanding, acceptance and equality for LGBTQ people and helps overcome the misconceptions and ignorance about sexual orientation and gender identity. We have worked with many faith-based organisations and religious leaders in consultative and educational settings, who seek present a gospel of love and inclusion. One of those organisations was the International YMCA. I wrote about the outcome of that work [HERE](#). A strongly traditional Christian organisation (YMCA) is now LGBTQ affirming and works in many countries around the world where LGBTQ people face great hardships. This is a wonderful outcome and a step forward. It appears that Australian law is intending to take us backwards.

Recently a person left the comment below on the post about the YMCA outcome.

"It is impossible to be the existence of LGBT and the Great Religion of Islam on one land at the same time , Allah..... Your God Your Creator..... Has cursed all LGBT..... the Queer pigs.... in fact they are lower and more dirtier than pigs because they are corrupting God's land and deforming the human creation , Allah the only God has promised to destroy them all through the Great Religion of Islam in order to save the real people from their evil , Or they have to repent to their God from the crimes and evil that they are committing on God's land . The words in these three links is the Solution , and it is the remedy , and it is The security for hundreds millions of People , including the people in Western Society , not perhaps ... and not I hope ... And not I wish but it will certainly Be the beginning of a Great new Era to Awaken nations of people from their Satanic Coma .

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fUMYhO_HEdsiqRhdqg_TqI3Y9R5jixTx/view?usp=sharing

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OELmaJgTOuq4it-dmakqhsqzcT9qqIqR/view?usp=sharing>

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BQ0Z7W_W2hbAX5DW7-bIDjQTli8Oa185/view?usp=sharing

Of course, the comment was not approved, and I would not engage with an individual who made such offensive and outlandish comments. The proposed Religious Freedom Bill would not only encourage people to make such comments but would protect them. Is that really the kind of Australian society we want? I think not.

I thought the initial Religious Freedom Bill proposed, was bad enough and I lodged a submission in opposition to it. I still stand behind the issues raised in that submission. The second exposure drafts of the bills are even worse.

I really can't see how any individual or organisation that receives government (taxpayer) funding can be given the legal right to discriminate and/or refuse services to individuals, they choose not to help. This is ludicrous. The second draft makes it legal for this to happen; and to happen to vulnerable people often at vulnerable times in their lives. This is cruel and most certainly incongruous with the values that religious people espouse. Where is the love and compassion of God?

In December last year, I attended a three day conference with major national and multi-national corporations representing millions of Australians. The overwhelming consensus about the government's plans to introduce a Religious Freedom Bill was firstly, in the current form it creates a nightmare of numerous, needless complexities for employers, secondly it will roll back important progress made in the cultures of diversity and inclusion in their workplaces and finally the bill is actually completely unnecessary considering all the legislation that is already in place.

In Australia religious individuals already have rights to practice their religion and have freedoms to do so; and so they should. We do not need any further legislation that will create a less tolerant society as the current proposals will do.

Sincerely

Anthony Venn-Brown

Founder and CEO of Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI)

Honoured to be voted one of the 25 Most Influential Gay & Lesbian Australians (2007 & 2009), finalist for the 2011 ACON Community Hero Award and winner of 2015 ACON's Health and Wellbeing Award.

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Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International's mission is to create understanding and acceptance for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) people, empower community members and build bridges with religious organisations and leaders