

## People of Faith Speak Out Against the Religious Discrimination Bill

As leading organisations representing and advocating with *LGBTIQ+ People of Faith* and *People of Faith who support LGBTIQ+ members of our communities*, we urge that the current Religious Discrimination Bill be withdrawn from Federal Parliament and a genuine participative process be established to enable widely-agreed protective, not persecuting, rights for all. As it stands, the Bill can only enflame and enable further religious-based repression, without addressing the most pressing issues of religious concern, which impact upon marginalised people like ourselves.

So many of members of our religious communities are victims of religious-institution-based abuse and these experiences of abuse are a significant driver of our desire to see real safeguards for people of faith and all Australians, so that we are all able to live out our religious beliefs and other convictions without experiencing harm in our community places, where there should be safe places for all Australians.

We have seen (not least in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse) how easily that safety can be lost - and how easily the true religious values of church or religious institutions are lost - when leaders exercise power without scrutiny and accountability. As LGBTIQ+ People of Faith, and People of Faith who support our LGBTIQ+ members, our participation in religious bodies takes many forms, but one central aspect is to challenge the self-serving actions of institutional leadership, and to create and push for checks and balances to the abuses of power and political influence in the hierarchies of religious bodies.

We are concerned that this Bill would further embolden those who currently wield so much institutional power, to use this power to the detriment of ordinary People of Faith in religious institutions and schools, who find themselves the target of harassment and bullying for their sex, ability/disability, marital status, sexual orientation or gender identity - ordinary People of Faith who are there in every congregation and school, and who ask only to be accepted and supported in their faith journeys.. This Bill, as currently framed, would make it **extraordinarily** difficult for ordinary people of faith to experience this safety and acceptance; it would make it difficult for us to hold our leaders to account.

LGBTIQA+ people are to be found in every faith community, and have particular need for understanding and support in contexts where they have historically been abused, misunderstood and scapegoated. LGBTIQA+ People of Faith don't just cease to exist because a particular religious faction refuses to acknowledge their presence. LGBTIQ+ People of Faith and People of Faith who support LGBTIQ+ members of our communities refuse to stop existing simply because an institution would prefer us not to exist. We are a part of our faith communities, and that we continue to offer service to our faith and our religious institutions. We ask that our basic human rights to be recognised and those of all other vulnerable people whose lives are at threat from this legislation.

Signatories:

**Australian Catholics for Equality**

**Equal Voices**

**Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches Australia**

**Progressive Christian Voice**

**Rainbodhi LGBTQIA+ Buddhist Community**

**Rainbow Catholic InterAgency for Ministry**

**Spark Church**

**Sydney Queer Muslims**

**Uniting Network**

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