

The AASW calls on the government to halt the introduction of its Religious Freedom Bills into Parliament until the Australian Law Reform Commission finishes its inquiry into religious freedom exemptions in existing anti-discrimination legislation. AASW National President Christine Craik said, "Some of the exemptions contained in the second draft exposure bills have the potential to harm members of the Australian community. "Allowing people to make discriminatory and disrespectful statements of belief under the guise of 'religious freedom' undermines all the work Australia has done to become a more tolerant society. "Social work as a profession is underpinned by respect for persons, social justice and professional integrity. These principles reflect an unwavering commitment to human rights and respect for diversity. While we agree that people should have freedom of belief and conscience, people should also be free from discriminatory and disrespectful practices. These bills could undermine gains made in other areas and remove protections from vulnerable groups, including women and the LGBTIQ community." Social workers know the effects of discrimination on vulnerable people and the AASW opposes any legislation that has the potential to remove existing protections. Ms Craik said, "We are also concerned that this legislation seeks to include faith-based community sector organisations under the umbrella of religious bodies. This mischaracterises the important work this sector does to assist vulnerable people of all backgrounds and underestimates their commitment to non-discriminatory practices and their professionalism. "We know many of our members are employed within these organisations. They are employed because of their qualifications and expertise as social workers, not because of their religious beliefs." This legislation is ill-considered in its current form. Ms Craik said, "The Australian Law Reform Commission is due to release its findings in December 2020. We urge the government not to proceed with any new religious anti-discrimination legislation until this review is complete."

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