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Dear Senate Committee

I appreciate the opportunity to prepare a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee in relation to its Inquiry into the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Amendment Bill 2023.

This 'Health Infrastructure Enabling Bill 2023' is a major concern the way it was enacted. It should have been subject to an in-depth, transparent and consultative discussions and debates in the Parliament and referred to a parliamentary committee for significant examination. There should also have been public submission. However, this process was totally evaded and the move was swift and rushed.

Australians (not just Christians or religious people) are horrified at this hostile takeover that lacked transparency. It is shameful that in our democratic culture here in Australia that this act of the ACT Government could even be thought of let alone enacted. If this action is not scrutinised and the ACT Government held accountable, what type of precedent does it set in Australia and what does that look like for other religious-based institutions in the future?

At its core, it seems the aggressive move of the ACT Government was a breach of religious freedom rights in relation to this institution. Calvary Public Hospital was owned and operated by the Roman Catholic church and had the right as a religious institution to operate according to conscience and remain loyal to its core beliefs by not offering abortions and not being willing to compromise its Christian values and ethics in relation to the proposed, upcoming euthanasia laws purported to be the worst in Australia by accommodating euthanasia for as young as 14 year old children (should this become legal in ACT).

Calvary Public Hospital has an exemplary record in providing healthcare in ACT with an approximation of 93% excellent positive/experience reported by patients in the discharge survey. If the hospital was performing efficiently and implementing its inherent values (with the right to do so), why then did the ACT Government claim the takeover was based on achieving greater efficiency operated by Territory-wide public health system. It appears to be a contradiction in terms and actions that a hospital that was a top performing health institution (more efficient than its public counterparts in the ACT) has been painted in a false way and the actions of the ACT Government have placed the Canberra healthcare system at risk through this unethical and mandatory acquisition.

It appears this hostile, communist style act had ulterior motives that were ideologically based. Why does the ACT Government believe their ideology that embraces abortion and euthanasia (soon to be made legal) has a greater right to be championed and implemented over and above a religious based institution that is pro-life? It is clear that the ACT Government has taken action to intentionally impose its ideology on Calvary, a faith-based institution and this violates religious

freedom rights in a country that is democratic. The forced acquisition of Calvary public hospital as ideologically motivated is an assault on religious freedoms and is ultimately inconsistent with our Australian society as we know it. This is a serious issue that Australians now face in this country if individuals and institutions are having their freedoms challenged and assaulted in the context of democracy where they have the right to exist and exercise religious freedom. The swift, aggressive move of the ACT Government that lacked this type of definition of a democratic society is inconsistent in our form of Government in Australia.

Whilst this act of a hostile acquisition appears to be ideologically motivated and an assault on religious freedoms, particularly for Calvary Hospital institution, there are numerous Australian citizens who may not embrace faith-based beliefs, but they do appreciate the values of Christian beliefs as the fundamental foundations our country is built upon. A large proportion of Australian citizens who do not profess to be "religious" still object to abortion and euthanasia. So, whilst this is an assault on religious freedoms, it is also an assault on the rights of Australian citizens who wish to live and work in institutions that oppose abortion and euthanasia. Calvary Public Hospital employed many workers who may not have been "catholic" or "religious" but who agreed with the inherent values and practices of the hospital. This takeover of Calvary Public hospital has denied numerous Australians to work according to their belief or freedom of conscience.

All faith-based religious institutions including hospitals, schools, churches, and service providers must be free to exercise conscientious objection to any practice or procedure that stands at odds with their core beliefs and convictions. Otherwise, we are not a free, democratic society. The actions of the ACT Government have now introduced very dangerous grounds by enacting a "no-tolerance" message to all other religious institutions. If we are a democratic society, then don't let the creep of communism drive an atheistic culture that is devoid of God and faith under the hands of an authoritarian Government who has a heavy hand and exercises overreach that has the effect of incalculating hatred for religious / Christian people that motivates their actions, forcing Christians to live inconsistently with their beliefs.

Please also consider that religious / Christian heritage brings a rich layer of truth to our lives and one of redemptive hope for our country. Religious / Christian organisations also enact benevolent support for society through charities, churches and hospitals that the Government in Australia has always needed and valued. This hostile act of the ACT Government poses a threat which will have long-term catastrophic implications if it is not brought under the microscope of an inquiry.

I ask that you support the 'Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Amendment Bill 2023' which will require the ACT Government to order its own inquiry into this shameful act, which left unchecked will lay a pathway for further destruction in the ACT and Australia-wide.

Thank you for taking time to read my submission and to consider the contents of this message and to consider supporting my request.

Yours sincerely

Helen Blanch