

*Dear Committee members,*

*Thank you for the efforts you make to review legislation for relevance, fairness and to ensure the benefit of all citizens.*

*I am a N.S.W. voter, resident of the Electorate of Parkes, and I am writing to express my deep concern about the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Removing Discrimination Against Students) Bill 2018.*

*I understand the motivation behind the Bill (namely, to prevent students being expelled from religious schools merely on the basis of their sexuality).*

*However, these are the reasons why I think it is not a solution to public perceptions and concern about the expulsion of gay students from Christian schools.*

*1) Current public discussion has been built on a lie – faith-based schools have made it clear that students are not being expelled simply on the basis of their sexual orientation. Even the initial media reporting on the leaked recommendations of the Ruddock report (from the likes of the SMH) did not allege that students were or had been expelled merely for being gay.*

*2) However, the current ALP-sponsored Bill goes far beyond dealing with this problem, and will seriously reduce the religious freedom of religious schools to operate in accordance with their religious beliefs.*

*3) The removal of section 38(3) will remove religious freedom protections for the ‘provision of education’ – having far broader impact than has been claimed.*

*4) The Bill is also so widely framed that it removes protections for all “religious bodies” in relation to “education”, and this has the potential to make it unlawful for churches, mosques and synagogues to teach the doctrines of their faith to their own members.*

*5) It would be best if legislation was not rushed through at the last minute. Parliament should wait until the Ruddock Report has been released and there is time for car*

*eful consideration and consultation before making any amendments in this area.*

*6) International law to which Australia is a signatory recognises religious freedom as a fundamental human right and accords it the highest possible protection - not just to holding a belief but expressing that belief, including through the establishment of schools based on those beliefs.*

*Please consider the legal issue outlined, in the following blogposts from Associate Professor Neil Foster, faculty of Law at Newcastle University:*

*<https://lawandreligionaustralia.blog/2018/12/01/government-amendments-to-religious-schools-bill/>*

*<https://lawandreligionaustralia.blog/2018/11/29/alp-bill-on-religious-schools-and-students/>*

*In summary: there are enormous weaknesses with the Bill as it stands - and the government amendments are still problematic. If there is no urgent crisis that needs to be addressed, then why rush this Bill through Parliament? Why not wait until the Ruddock Report has been fully released?*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Colin W. Johnston, M.Ec.*