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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretary,

Introduction

Family First welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee's inquiry into the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Amendment Bill 2023.

The Family First Party is a movement of 30,000 supporters including 4000 party members seeking to stand women and men who will fight for and sustain the social and economic well-being of the nation by promoting family, life, faith, freedom and enterprise in the parliaments of Australia. Family first is a political party for Australians of all faiths and none but recognises that the Judeo-Christian ethic best provides freedom and tolerance for all. This ethic underpins the party's policy-making for the common good.

Background

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government announced on 11 May 2023 that it would acquire Calvary Public Hospital, its land and its assets - terminating the remaining 76 years of its contract, forcibly transferring Calvary's land, assets and staff to ACT Health.

On the back of the national and international outcry against this pre-emptive action by the ACT Government, Family First supports the Bill's intent to insert a requirement that the ACT Government conduct an inquiry into the ACT legislation that enabled such an acquisition.

This is a reasonable provision given that the forced acquisition of Calvary came as a shock and was conducted without consultation or due process.

Religious freedom concerns

Family first is extremely concerned that the acquisition is an egregious infringement upon the religious freedom of the Catholic church to provide health care services to the people of the ACT. As such, it is an infringement upon the freedom of all people of religion.

It has set a precedent that has sent shock waves through religious communities throughout the nation. This action of a government hostile to religion has ramifications for all religious institutions which own property. If a militantly secularist government like that of the ACT can compulsorily acquire a religious hospital that does not perform abortions and refuses to participate in euthanasia, no religious institution out of sync with prevailing government ideology is safe.

The Abrahamic faiths in particular have a strong ethic of marriage, family and the sanctity of human life. They adhere to the biological reality of the gender binary. These are values not supported by the ACT government and a public inquiry is warranted to determine the level of animus towards these values that may have informed the decision-making process.

Religious people seek assurance that governments will make room for diverse religious views and practices and for these to be allowed to be lived out in the provision of health, education and charitable services.

Conclusion

Only the light of a public inquiry conducted by the ACT Legislative Assembly can illuminate whether or not this is still possible in the ACT.

Given that the ACT Legislative Assembly is a unicameral chamber lacking the normal scrutiny upper houses provide in the Westminster system, a public inquiry is the bare minimum required to restore a modicum of public confidence given this unfortunate episode.

Yours sincerely,

Lyle Shelton
National Director
Family First Party