



# PALMERSTON Christian School

a campus of NT Christian Schools

Director, Legal Policy  
Department of the Attorney-General and Justice  
GPO Box 1722  
DARWIN NT 0801

31 January 2018

To Whom It May Concern

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the legislative process by allowing feedback for proposed changes to the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act. It is good to review existing laws and policies on a periodic basis and we are thankful to see our local government taking the time to review this act which is so pertinent to our current political context. It would be our desire to see that the changes proposed would be in the best possible interest of all parties involved.

As we represent a Christian educational institution in the Northern Territory who currently receive the benefits of the religious exemption, the primary focus of our response will centre on Question 14: "Should any exemptions for religious or cultural bodies be removed?". Our unanimous response to this question is; **NO**, religious exemptions should not be removed for schools, places of accommodation or sacred sites. They should continue to benefit from the protections that will continue to be extended to other legislatively protected discriminations of a religious nature.

The education and instruction of children is a vital piece of any world religion. Followers of all main world faiths consider how they educate their children as integral to how the children will adapt their cultural and social understanding of their religion to the world around them. The Christian and Judaic faiths both contain strong instruction admonishing parents to spend much care and effort in instructing their children in their belief system.

If a Christian educational institution is not allowed to hire staff based on their religious beliefs, this will directly impact the level of Christian instruction received by the students in their care. In the same way, an Islamic educational institution who is not allowed to hire staff based on their belief system will see a direct impact on their ability to impart beliefs to their children. We do not propose that only Christian institutions be protected by this exemption, but that ALL religious educational organisations be protected by this exemption. Strong religious belief is not something that is taught purely in a religion lesson, but it is taught through the example of how that belief is applied to all the subjects of daily life. How does that belief guide decision making and critical thinking processes? The choice of staff of the same religious background is vital for imparting this portion of the instruction that parents seek by having children attend a religious school. Parents want to continue parent choice of the same belief system as at home.

As our world has grown and modernised, the introduction and application of public schooling has taken over much of the home instruction that took place over past centuries. Part of what has allowed public education to thrive in Australia is the ability of parents to have a variety of choice in educational options. Parents have the right to choose education based on a variety of different

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religious belief systems. To date, parents have the ability to choose a school based on their own belief system. By failing to protect the rights of a religious institution to hire staff based on belief, the act will in effect diminish choice in schooling options for parents in the Northern Territory. For parents who place a high value on religious instruction, the move towards home-schooling may be an unforeseen side effect.

In summary, the protection of religious educational institutions being able to hire based on religious beliefs, ensures the institution will be seen as a viable education option for parents. It protects the variety and ability for choice that parents currently enjoy in choosing a school for their children.

In regard to another question being proposed in the changes, we would like to submit input on Question 21: "Should the term "parenthood" be replaced with "carer responsibilities"?. We do not believe that a person who is a "carer" is the same as a person who is considered a "parent" and indeed the document's further explanation of a carer's role shows it is a different type of relationship "Examples include caring for a spouse or parent". A parent role for a child is a lifelong relationship that is encapsulated in the existing definition of parent as seen in the act. If it is decided to include protections for those in a carer role in other relationships, it should rather come as another category and not be grouped into the parent defined protections that currently exist.

We sincerely thank you for taking the time to assess our feedback on the proposed changes to the Anti-Discrimination Act. We appreciate you seeking input from your constituents from a variety of backgrounds and opinions as you seek to come to the best possible solution for updating the Act.

Yours sincerely

  
  
Paul Rodgers  
Chairperson  
On behalf of Palmerston Christian School Council