

Submission to Religious Freedom Bills

I consider myself to be a progressive Christian and I make this submission in that context.

I support the concept of religious freedom so long as it cannot be used to dominate or hold power over certain minority groups such as LGBTIQ.

I do, however, question why new Religious Freedom Laws are needed in Australia?

I agree with Rev Peter Catt, President of APCVA (A Progressive Christian Voice Australia) and quote from his media statement on the Religious Freedom Bill:

“Freedom of religion has to do with the freedom to hold to a particular belief system, freedom to assemble for worship unhindered, and freedom to undertake religious observance and practice. It does not and should not include insulating church institutions or members from being challenged or criticised for poor behaviour.

There is a real danger that a Religious Freedom Bill will become a Freedom to be Sectarian Bill. Religion when it functions properly is about love and inclusion.....” Ref

<https://www.progressivechristians.org.au/uncategorized/media-release-no-need-for-religious-freedom-bill/>

We already find that the hierarchy of the various religious church institutions attempt to use their power to impose their own church dogma and views on issues such as Marriage Equality and Voluntary Assisted Dying on all Australians, including those who are not of that faith, or indeed not of any faith.

However, this submission particularly relates to Voluntary Assisted Dying in the jurisdictions in Australia where VAD legislation has been enacted to permit this end of life choice, subject to the regulation and criteria of each Act.

It can be noted that, for example in Canada, various facilities such as hospice and aged care that operate under the auspices of a religious basis, are refusing to allow dying patients access to their legal option of Medical Assistance in Dying, which is legislated for throughout Canada, on the grounds that it contradicts the ethos of the facility.

This can extend to refusing to allow a patient to even be assessed by their doctor to ascertain if they comply with the criteria for MAID. I read of a patient being wheeled outside to be assessed in a bus shelter by their doctor. Patients close to death and already enduring the unbearable suffering required to access the MAID are also in some cases being moved by ambulance to another facility for the MAID to be administered.

A typical example may be found in the dispute between Fraser Health, Delta Hospice and Irene Thomas Hospice in Delta, a town south of Vancouver, Canada. Particularly note the reversal of initial approval to permit MAID, the ‘stacking’ of

meetings, pressure re voting etc! We need to avoid this type of standoff/confrontation in Australia on the grounds of religious beliefs. Essential evidence here > <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-delta-divided-over-hospice-refusal-of-assisted-dying/>

I therefore ask that the Religious Freedom Bills include the provision that it is mandatory for any religiously operated hospital, hospice, or aged care facility that refuses to permit VAD on their religious grounds, in jurisdictions where it is a legal option, must make this restriction clearly and publicly available to any person prior to their seeking admission to such a facility.

I also believe that any Australian facility refusing to permit VAD where it is legal should not be given public funding of tax payers money, but this may be out of the area of the Religious Freedom Bills?

The Explanatory Notes are not completely clear to me, but it does appear that a staff member in a hospital, hospice, aged care facility or even a school operated under a religious basis with an ethos against VAD, could be discriminated against, even to the point of losing their job, or not be employed in the first instance, if they publicly posted their support for legal VAD in social media. This would of course be 'reverse discrimination', must be avoided and it is essential to have a statement to that effect in the Religious Freedom Bills. This aspect is particularly relevant where one of the 75% of Christians who support VAD (Vote Compass 2019) wishes to work in the health or education sector where religious influence by the church hierarchy against VAD is prominent.

Ian Wood

I am the National Co-ordinator and Spokesperson for the Australian group, *Christians Supporting Voluntary Assisted Dying*. While I have not had the opportunity to survey members for their input on the above Submission, I believe they would strongly endorse my comments here on Voluntary Assisted Dying.

Mittagong NSW 2575