

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

Dear Committee Members,

I write following the Senate's referral of the provisions of the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021, Religious Discrimination (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2021 and Human Rights Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry.

ReachOut, one of Australia's leading digital youth mental health services, knows that discrimination has significant potential to negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of vulnerable communities.

While we understand that these bills are intended to proscribe discrimination on the basis of faith, which we fully support, as drafted they will have the opposite effect for LGBTQIA+ people, women, people with disability and others in the community.

We are very concerned that the proposed legislation will undo existing discrimination protections for LGBTQIA+ people, women, people with disability and others in the community. This risks compromising the incredible progress Australia has made in recent years towards inclusivity in workplaces, universities, and schools.

We know that one in four Australians will experience a mental health difficulty before the age of 25, and the 70% of young people experiencing a mental illness do not seek formal support. For vulnerable groups who are already at a higher risk of mental health issues, discrimination can have a significant, compounding impact.

The 'statements of belief' provisions mean that affronting, offensive or defamatory statements towards LGBTQIA+ people, women, people with disability and others in the community will be protected by law, ultimately enabling discrimination towards these communities. We believe that this is particularly alarming and, as an organisation that supports the mental health and wellbeing of young people, it is especially concerning to think that students, employees and other individuals could lose protections against being marginalised on the basis of their gender, sexuality or disability.



**ReachOut Australia**

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We believe that all young people should have the right to be treated fairly and respectfully, regardless of their sex, gender, race, religion, age, sexual preference or if they have any kind of disability. ReachOut does not have the capacity to provide a full submission to this process at such short notice, but fully endorses Equality Australia's comprehensive submission.

In the best interests of protecting the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians we strongly urge these Bills not be proceeded in their current form and instead people of faith be protected from discrimination without removing discrimination protections from others.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashley de Silva', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Ashley de Silva**

Chief Executive Officer