



MEDIA RELEASE

Don't rush the Religious Discrimination Bill

President of the Uniting Church in Australia Rev Sharon Hollis has urged Federal Parliamentarians not to rush the *Religious Discrimination Bill 2021* through the Senate this week.

This comes as two reports from Parliamentary Inquiries on the *Religious Discrimination Bill 2021* were released last Friday, both of which supported the passage of the Bill with the addition of only minor and technical amendments.

Rev Hollis expressed her disappointment at the findings, after a Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) Assembly submission to the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 expressed concern that the Bill fails to strike the correct balance between people's rights, protections and responsibilities.

"We have appreciated the opportunity to make submissions and to appear before both Inquiries," said Rev Hollis. "However, the reports do not address our concerns that some provisions in the Bill could embolden discrimination in the wider community and give implicit permission for discriminatory or demeaning statements and actions."

"Rather than building harmony and tolerance it could have a corrosive and divisive effect."

"We urge all Federal Members to not react in haste to the short time frame that has been given to this third and final draft's passage through both Houses, but take the time that is needed to fully examine the issues and reach out to community groups who have expressed genuine concerns."

The Uniting Church Assembly has resisted the idea that its members are the subject of discrimination on religious grounds, maintaining that its primary concern is for others who are or may become vulnerable to discrimination under the legislation.

In its submission and appearances, the Assembly expressed particular concern for the safety and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people, people with disabilities, women, and people of minority faith communities should the Bill be passed in its current form.

The Assembly has long advocated that necessary protections from religious discrimination would best be made through the mechanism of a comprehensive Human Rights Act, within which the competing claims and values inherent in this discussion may be grounded in a holistic approach to human rights.

Rev Hollis reiterated previous statements that the Uniting Church does not seek to discriminate as an organisation or an employer, and its firm commitment to diversity and inclusion in community life and employment practices.

"I want to reassure all people that whether or not this Bill passes into law, the Uniting Church in Australia and its wide network of service agencies will continue to be places of welcome and inclusion for all people."

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