



GRADUATE WOMEN-NSW Inc

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Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash
Attorney General
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

BY EMAIL: attorney@ag.gov.au

Dear Attorney General,

Religious Discrimination Bill

I am writing on behalf of Graduate Women-NSW. For more than 125 years we have promoted and supported women and girls through education to reach their full potential to participate and contribute as equals in our society. Many of the customs and practices which discriminate and subjugate women in Australia today purport, often mistakenly, to be based on religion.

We support the implementation of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion in Australia as we support the implementation of all international human rights in Australia. However, this Bill raises significant questions about the protection of women's human rights, particularly the rights to non-discrimination. It seems likely that the practical application of the Bill will create conflict with other existing protections such as the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*. We are concerned that the Bill inadvertently privileges religious freedom over other vital human rights.

We are deeply concerned that the Bill will enable environments in which it is acceptable to make sexist or misogynistic comments on the basis of religious belief, with serious implications for women's participation in employment, public life, and the primary prevention of violence against women.

We are also concerned that the Bill will create significant confusion around discrimination and employer responsibilities to women, both in the workplace and when accessing services. As a matter of practicality, the onus will be on employers and service providers to determine whether an individual's statement constitutes a legitimate religious belief under the Bill, in order to determine whether a women's right to protection from sex-based discrimination can be overridden in this particular circumstance.

Our concern is that the pressure on employers to make rapid, difficult and subjective decisions will ultimately result in employers choosing to avoid potential conflict by quietly failing to employ or promote women. The rights of women to participate equally and fearlessly in our society have been hard fought. Passing this Bill may, by its implementation, inadvertently endanger these rights.

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