

*The following is an open letter from the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison*

I write to you on a matter of great concern to Australians of all faiths.

As you may be aware, late last year I released our Government's response to the Religious Freedom Review, chaired by the Hon Philip Ruddock. I was also pleased to announce our plans to legislate a Religious Discrimination Act, to protect Australians of faith from discrimination. Our Government will also establish the position of Freedom of Religion Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. The new Commissioner will be dedicated to safeguarding the rights of religious Australians.

However, those are not the reasons for this letter. My reason for writing is a matter that is perhaps of even greater importance to you.

In October last year, the Government made a commitment to address the issue of discrimination against children in schools on the basis of sexual orientation.

The Government proposed legislative changes that sought to remove discrimination against children while also upholding the fundamental right to freedom of religion. Importantly, the changes we proposed would protect the right of religious schools and religious institutions to continue to teach and act in accordance with the tenets and doctrines of their faiths.

We hoped to reach a bipartisan solution.

Instead, the Leader of the Opposition introduced a Bill into the Parliament that would, for the first time, apply the full force of the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) to all bodies established for religious purposes: churches, mosques, synagogues, monasteries, convents, prayer groups, faith study groups, theological colleges, and all others.

Mr Shorten's Sex Discrimination Amendment (Removing Discrimination Against Students) Bill 2018 risks an unprecedented encroachment on religious freedom in this country. The effect of these changes would be to censor what can be taught in religious bodies and dictate how these bodies teach their faiths.

There is agreement across the Parliament to remove the provision of the SDA that currently permits religious educational institutions to discriminate against students on the basis of their identity. Our Government wishes to repeal it. However, the Liberal National Government cannot support the idea that the teachings and practices of temples, synagogues, churches and mosques across Australia should suddenly expose those bodies to lawsuits under anti-discrimination legislation.

For those reasons, we sought Mr Shorten's support for a Government Bill that would remove the right to discriminate against students while also protecting faith-based schools from legal action on the grounds I have described. The Bill would keep the current protections for other religious bodies such as churches, synagogues and mosques.

Mr Shorten refused this offer.

In this new year, please rest assured that the Government will continue to defend the right of religious bodies to teach and act in accordance with their faith.

You will find more information on our plans to protect religious freedom [here](#)

I would appreciate if you would consider informing your community of the Government's efforts on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

**Scott Morrison**  
**Prime Minister**