

Media Release

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STRONGER PROTECTIONS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION INTRODUCED

The Andrews Labor Government is continuing to protect LGBTIQ+ Victorians against discrimination, with landmark reforms now in effect and further new laws introduced to Parliament today.

The Government today introduced the *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Bill 2021* which will better protect LGBTIQ+ Victorians working within religious organisations and schools.

The Bill will narrow current exceptions so that discrimination on the basis of sexuality, marital status, gender identity or other protected attributes will not be permitted.

Religious organisations and schools will only be able to make employment decisions based on an employee's religious beliefs where these are inherent to the job. Religious bodies and schools will still be able to practice their faith, teach their beliefs and set the religious ethos within their organisation.

The reforms will also mean religious bodies that receive government funding to provide services will also not be able to refuse to provide those services to people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Government has undertaken extensive consultations with LGBTIQ+ groups, education peak bodies and faith-based groups to ensure that the new laws give fair recognition to those involved.

For the very first time, intersex Victorians are now also explicitly protected against discrimination under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, with sex characteristics now included as a protected attribute under the Act. Previously, intersex Victorians were only given limited protection under the Act under the definition of gender identity.

These new measures follow Intersex Awareness Day – a day observed across the globe to highlight human rights issues faced by people with an intersex variation.

Adding sex characteristics – defined as a person's physical features relating to sex such as chromosomes, hormones and anatomy – alongside race, disability, religious belief or activity and other protected attributes makes it clearer than ever that discrimination on this basis is unlawful and will not be tolerated.

Amendments updating outdated definitions of gender identity and sexual orientation under the Act have also commenced – reflecting a growing understanding and awareness of our diverse community and ensuring greater protection for trans and gender diverse Victorians against discrimination.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

“Every Victorian deserves to live without fear of discrimination – regardless of who they are or who they love.”

“Our extensive consultation has been crucial to making sure these laws recognise the important needs of faith communities and protect Victorians from discrimination based on who they are.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Equality Martin Foley

“We celebrate our intersex community and acknowledge the challenges they face. That's why we're taking action to better protect intersex and LGBTIQ+ Victorians against discrimination.”

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