

Media Release

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Friday, 3 December 2021

LAWS PASS TO STOP DISCRIMINATION AGAINST VICTORIANS

The Andrews Labor Government has sent a strong message that there is no place for discrimination in Victorian schools and workplaces, with landmark laws passed in Parliament today.

Under the *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Bill 2021*, religious organisations and schools will no longer be able to sack or refuse to hire people based on protected attributes such as sexuality, gender identity or marital status.

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 such as a religious studies teacher, or a principal.

The Bill recognises the rights of religious organisations and schools to continue to practice their faith, provide religious teaching and instill their religious ethos within their organisation. The legislation will not impact on how religious bodies can select priests, ministers, religious leaders or their members.

In addition to the employment reforms, religious organisations that receive Victorian government funding to provide services will not be able to refuse to provide those services to people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Previous protections to prevent discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people were shamefully stripped back in 2011 by the former Liberal Government, and were also blocked by the Liberals from being reinstated in 2016.

This left many teachers and other employees at religious organisations in fear of being outed to their employers, potentially risking their livelihoods where their sexuality, marital status or gender identity had nothing to do with their role.

The Labor Government consulted extensively with LGBTIQ+ groups, education peak bodies, faith leaders and faith-based groups in drafting the legislation.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"It's been a long journey to fix these gaps in our laws – I hope with these changes all Victorians can live authentically, free of fear and in no doubt that the law has their back too."

"Our reforms respect the independence of religious bodies while reducing critical gaps in protections against discrimination."

Quote attributable to Minister for Equality Martin Foley

"These laws send a clear message that discrimination against LGBTIQ+ Victorians based on who they are or who they love is simply not acceptable."