

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

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NEW LAWS COMMENCE TO PROTECT LGBTIQ+ VICTORIANS

Landmark laws to better protect LGBTIQ+ Victorians from discrimination at work and in school will come into effect from today, sending a strong message from the Andrews Labor Government that equality is non-negotiable.

The *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Act 2021* was passed by the Government on 3 December 2021 as part of the ongoing work to make Victoria fairer for all.

From today, 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, and the discrimination is reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.

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 how religious bodies can select priests, ministers, religious leaders or their members.

The Labor Government consulted extensively with LGBTIQ+ groups, education peak bodies, faith leaders and faith-based groups in drafting the legislation to ensure the Act meets the needs of communities, respects the independence of religious bodies and strikes a fair balance.

Further provisions of the Act will commence in December 2022. These include ensuring that religious organisations that receive government funding to provide services will not be able to refuse to provide them to people based on protected attributes.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"These laws have been a long time coming and it's been a painful journey for our LGBTIQ+ community to achieve these changes – I hope today is a day they can be proud of."

"No one should have to hide who they love to do the job they love – from today, Victorians don't have to. These reforms respect the independence of religious bodies while reducing critical gaps in protections against discrimination."

Quote attributable to Minister for Equality Martin Foley

"Equality is not negotiable in Victoria – these changes show how important it is to continue backing the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community in all aspects of life."