

Action alert: Why freedom of religion and belief is important

Senator Dean Smith introduced the *Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Bill 2017* to legalise same sex marriage, following the Yes vote winning the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey. This Bill is being debated by Parliament.

Senator Smith's Bill has a narrow view of religious freedom with protections confined to the marriage ceremony. Changing the law on marriage has much wider implications and requires protections for Australians and organisations with a traditional view of marriage.

What is religious freedom?

The right to freedom of religion and belief includes the right to hold or not hold beliefs, to show or practise beliefs in public or private. It is not a right restricted to places of worship.

Why is religious freedom important?

If Australian governments want to understand Australians - the majority of whom proclaim a religious faith - they need to understand and accommodate religious belief.

Religious believers are the strong majority of Australians. More than 14 million Australians – 60.3% – have a religious belief, whether from a Christian, Jewish, Muslim or other faith. Catholics make up 5.2 million of that number or 22.6% of the Australian population.

Key religious freedom protections

Australians should have the right to freely express their views on marriage, publicly and privately, without detriment.

- Archbishop Julian Porteous was brought before the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commission for distributing a letter about Catholic teaching on marriage.

Catholic and other agencies should have protection from losing their charitable status because of their view on marriage.

- Earlier this year, a New Zealand organisation lost its charitable status because its views on marriage were determined by the regulator to be not to the public benefit.

Parents, of all faiths and none, choose Catholic schools for their children because they expect that this education will be provided by school staff in a manner consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Church.

- The Victorian Government put forward draft laws last year that would have made it more difficult for schools to determine who they employ and the religious culture they can create in the school by hiring staff who have common beliefs.

Contact your Federal parliamentarians - tell them how important religious freedom is to you