

Tuesday 23 November 2021

## Morrison's Religious Discrimination Bill to enable workplace discrimination

The ACTU supports protections for workers and others against all forms of discrimination including against religious belief or activity. Every worker has the right to a safe, healthy, and respectful workplace, regardless of religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, disability, or other personal attribute.

However, the government's Bill will privilege the rights of religious organisations over individual workers with different (or no) religious beliefs, even where their religious beliefs or activities have no relevance to their job. The Bill will allow religious bodies (such as religious charities, schools, hospitals, aged care facilities and accommodation providers) to hire, fire or promote workers based on their religion, regardless of whether their religion is relevant to their job. State laws that provide greater protections for staff in religious schools can be overridden by the Bill.

There is real risk that these laws will be used as a 'cloak' to discriminate against workers who raise complaints, seek assistance from their union or take other action in their workplaces to stand up for their own rights or the rights of others.

The Bill will protect people who make discriminatory religious 'statements of belief', even if they are offensive, inappropriate, and harmful. The Bill will override existing anti-discrimination protections and cause confusion, conflict, and disharmony in workplaces. Unions are deeply concerned that these new laws will undermine the mental health and safety of Australian workers. For example, working women who are subjected to sexist and discriminatory statements by their employers deprived of legal protection. The government should be working to make work safer for all workers, not enabling any form of discrimination.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"All workers should be protected from all forms of discrimination at work including on the basis of their religion, however, the Morrison Government is trying to take Australia backwards and this Bill will allow employers to make humiliating, inappropriate and harmful comments about women, LGBTQI+ people, people with disability and a range of other marginalised communities, and completely overrides current anti-discrimination laws.

"Once again Mr Morrison is failing women. In 2021 he could have legislated all 55 recommendations of Respect@Work report but instead he's introducing a bill that will make work less safe for women.

"The Religious Discrimination Bill gives exemptions to religious employers to discriminate against workers on religious grounds. We are concerned this will be used by some employers to 'cloak' discrimination against workers who raise complaints, seek assistance from their union or take action to stand up for the rights of themselves and others.

"The Morrison Government must ensure that all workers, regardless of religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender, disability or other personal attribute have the right to healthy, safe and respectful work.

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