

JOINT STATEMENT FROM NORTHERN TERRITORY ORGANISATIONS TO ABANDON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BILL

4 February 2020

The Federal Government's Religious Discrimination Bill 2019 threatens Territorians' access to employment, health and social services

The Religious Discrimination Bill 2019 threatens Territorians' human rights and access to non-discriminatory employment, health and social services.

The organisations and groups supporting this statement believe that to live free from discrimination, including living free from discrimination based on a person's religion, is a human right.

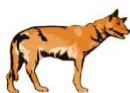
We wholly reject the Religious Discrimination Bill 2019 and call for it to be abandoned, because it could impinge upon the rights of many within our community to be protected against discrimination.

The Religious Discrimination Bill 2019 could disproportionately impact Territorians' access to health services. Remote communities in the NT often only have one or two health and social service providers. The Bill could limit access to services for sexual health, family planning, fertility, mental health, and same-sex attracted and trans and gender diverse support. As most members of remote communities in the NT are Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal Territorians may be significantly impacted.

Under the Religious Discrimination Bill 2019:

- A woman could be denied access to the contraceptive pill due to the religious beliefs of her health worker. In the NT, there are limited health services and long distances between other providers – this Bill could add another barrier to health care.
- Religious bodies could discriminate on the basis of religious belief when making employment decisions. Many faith-based service providers in the NT are funded by government to deliver services, but would be permitted to only hire workers of a particular faith, or to fire a worker who did not adhere to a particular faith.
- People of faith could express harmful views in a workplace as statements of belief. This includes a person telling their recently divorced colleague that they have committed a grave sin. Or a worker in an aged care facility telling an elderly gay man that he will go to hell when he dies. As a result, NT workplaces may become less inclusive.

All Territorians have the equal right to live free from discrimination. The Federal Government's Religious Discrimination Bill 2019 would take us further away from this goal, rather than closer to it. The bill should be rejected.



Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory (CLANT)

Dameyon Bonson

