

FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS COULD CLOSE AFTER CHANGES TO NORTHERN TERRITORY DISCRIMINATION ACT

16 NOVEMBER 2022

The Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) agrees with comments made by Catholic Bishop Charles Gauci on Katie Woolf's 360 program this morning that the NT Government's proposed changes to the Discrimination Act could cause serious problems for faith-based schools.

Bishop Gauci said he would 'seriously consider closing' Catholic schools in the NT if this legislation is passed. Christian Schools are equally concerned about the ongoing viability of their schools if this law passes.

"We urge the Fyles Government to listen to the reasonable concerns of faith leaders before passing this deeply flawed Bill," said Vanessa Cheng, Executive Officer, AACS.

"It is completely unacceptable for the Northern Territory Government to ignore the concerns of respected faith leaders such as Bishop Gauci about the dramatic impact the proposed changes could have on the operation of religious schools," she said.

"The Government has also ignored the concerns of NT Christian Schools and has instead chosen to introduce a radical approach seen nowhere else in Australia by removing the long standing Religious Educational Institutions Employment Exemption (s 37A)," she said.

"Like the Catholic Bishop of Darwin, our repeated requests to meet with the Chief Minister and the Attorney-General have not been met with a positive response," said Ms Cheng.

"The comments by Attorney-General Chansey Paech to Katie Woolf in a separate interview this morning that these changes were the result of 'extensive consultations' are absolutely shocking as there was NO consultation around the removal of the 'religious belief and activity' exemption contained within section 37A."

"The same faith requirements that applies to senior leaders in Catholic schools, applies to all staff in NT Christian Schools," said Executive Officer, Vanessa Cheng, "completely removing 37A from the Discrimination Act leaves our schools vulnerable to claims of discrimination when it comes to employing staff who share the faith."

Media contact:

Vanessa Cheng, Executive Officer (0416 277 372)