

27 March 2024

The Hon. Anthony Albanese, MP
Prime Minister of Australia
CC: The Hon. Mark Dreyfus, MP
Attorney General
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

OPEN LETTER FROM FAITH LEADERS IN RESPONSE TO REPORTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONSIDER WORKING WITH THE GREENS TO IMPLEMENT THE AUSTRALIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

We write to express our deep concerns at media reports that suggest you are now considering negotiating with The Greens in order to implement the recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission (**ALRC**) and pass a religious discrimination bill.

While the Government has had access to the ALRC report since last year, it has only just been made available to those most affected by its recommendations, particularly religious schools. Only a select few have seen the two draft pieces of legislation, meaning there has been no opportunity for people of faith to offer detailed feedback to the Government or the Opposition.

We consider the reluctance of the Opposition to offer support to a legislative proposal for religious freedom which is – at this point – unseen and untested by faith communities to be reasonable and prudent, rather than an indication that a bipartisan approach endorsed by the faith communities is unachievable.

Further, we do not consider that any negotiation with The Greens will yield a result that provides any meaningful protections for religious freedom.

The policies of the Australian Greens include:

- Removing exemptions for all religious organisations in anti-discrimination law, not only those related to religious schools contained in section 38 of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1987*;
- Replacing school chaplaincy programs with the contentious Safe Schools program; and
- Making federal funding to hospitals – including those operated by religious organisations – contingent on the provision of abortion.

At a state level, the Greens have backed similar restrictions on religious exemptions in anti-discrimination laws and stripping funding from any non-government school that preferences students or staff on the basis of a religious background, abortion and euthanasia laws with few or no conscience protections and have sought to remove the option for Special Religious Education in government schools.

Based on this record, we expect that any proposal supported by The Greens will be unfavourable to faith communities. If the Government chooses to abandon attempts at bipartisanship and work with The Greens, it will be interpreted by our faith communities as a betrayal of trust.

We expect you to uphold your election commitment to maintain the right of religious educational institutions to preference people of their own faith, and not to compromise this to secure the support of The Greens.

We ask you to continue to work towards a bipartisan approach to this matter, in consultation with religious communities.

Signed,

Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP
Catholic Archbishop of Sydney



**His Eminence Archbishop
Makarios of Australia**
Primate and Exarch of All Oceania
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of
Australia



The Rt Rev Dr Michael Stead
Bishop of South Sydney
Anglican Diocese of Sydney



Hussein Faraj
President
United Shia Islamic Foundation



Robert Gregory
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Jewish Association



Surinder Jain
National Vice President
Hindu Council of Australia



Most Rev. Peter A. Comensoli
Catholic Archbishop of
Melbourne



**Bishop Antoine-Charbel
Tarabay**
Maronite Bishop of Australia,
New Zealand and Oceania



**Most Rev. Mor Malatius Malki
Malki**
Metropolitan Archbishop of
the Syrian Orthodox Church



**Very Rev. Msgr Basil
Sousanian**
Patriarchal Vicar of the
Armenian Catholic Church in
Australia



Most Rev. Robert Rabbat, DD
Eparch of the Melkite Catholic
Eparchy of Australia,
New Zealand and All Oceania



Archbishop Amel Nona
Bishop of the Chaldean Catholic
Diocese of St. Thomas the
Apostle in Australia and New
Zealand



Most Rev. Haigazoun Najarian
Primate of The Armenian
Apostolic Church of Australia
and New Zealand



**Very Rev. Chorbishop
Joseph Joseph**
Vicar General of The Ancient
Church of the East of Australia &
New Zealand



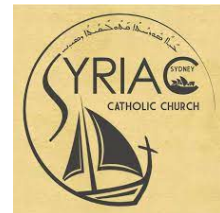
Most Rev. Anba Daniel
Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox
Church. Diocese of Sydney & its
affiliated Regions.



Most Rev. Basilios (Kodseie)
Metropolitan of Antiochian
Orthodox Church of Australia,
New Zealand and the
Philippines



Most Rev. Georges Casmoussa
Apostolic Visitor
Syriac Catholic Church



Pastor Mark Edwards
Religious Freedom Representative
Australian Christian Churches



Rev. David Burke
Moderator General
Presbyterian Church of
Australia



Rev. Mark Wilson
National Ministries Director
Australian Baptist Churches



David Tse
Chairman
Sydney Chinese Christian
Churches Association



Al Stewart
National Director
Fellowship of Evangelical
Churches



Rev. Dr Ross Clifford
Executive Director
NSW Council of Churches



Suellen Holmes
Secretary, National Executive
International Network of
Churches



Wayne Swift
National Leader
Acts Global Churches



Rev. Sang Goo Song
President
The Council of the Ministers of
Korean Churches in Sydney,
Australia



Abdullah Khan
Executive Principal & CEO
Islamic Schools Association of
Australia



Mark Spencer
Director of Public Policy
Christian Schools Australia



Jacinta Collins
Executive Director
National Catholic Education
Commission



Nick Jensen
Political Liaison
Australian Christian Higher
Education Alliance



Alistair Macpherson
Executive Director, Public Policy
and Advocacy
Associated Christian Schools



Vanessa Cheng
Executive Officer
Australian Association of
Christian Schools



Dallas McInerney
Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Schools NSW



Kojo Akomeah
Associate Director for Public
Affairs and Religious Liberty
Seventh-day Adventist Church
Adventist Schools Australia



Dr Ali Al Samail
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Ahl Al Bait Islamic
Centre



Mark Sneddon
Executive Director
Institute for Civil Society



Michelle Pearse
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Christian Lobby



Mike Southon
Executive Director
Freedom for Faith



Graeme Janes
Chief Executive Officer
Christian Venues Association



Dr Byung Guen Kim
President
Sydney Holy City Movement



Rev. Fr. Andrewes Faraj
St Mark's Coptic Catholic
Church