



The Hon. Julia Gillard, MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

10 May 2013

Exceptions in the *Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Bill 2013* (the 'Bill')

Dear Prime Minister,

UnitingJustice exists as an expression of the Uniting Church's commitment to working towards a just and peaceful world. The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to the development of just public policy that prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society.

We are writing to you to express support for the removal of powers to discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTi) persons from the *Bill* (as currently proposed). As representatives of Christian agencies we see no publicly defensible grounds for discrimination against GLBTi persons by Commonwealth-funded aged care services. This includes discrimination on the grounds of religion. We therefore reject carrying over existing exceptions into the *Bill*.

In the first place such exceptions are not justified by general practice in the sector. The majority of sector agencies, including Christian agencies, do not refuse their services to GLBTi persons. Three of the largest providers, Catholic Health Care, Anglicare Australia and Uniting Care have expressly stated that their services are available to all regardless of sexual orientation or intersex status. Maintaining the exceptions will create a misleading impression about the views of these agencies as discriminatory. As Christian agencies we maintain that a power to deny services to certain sections of the community, especially those with a history of mistreatment is inconsistent with our values and principles. Yet we also recognise that different approaches exist among Christian groups. In such cases Christian organisations are still able to act in a manner that conforms to their conscience, albeit not while in receipt of Government funding.

Second, it is foreseeable that if such exceptions are available to Government-funded aged care providers, and then only very rarely relied upon, GLBTi persons and their families will experience unnecessary and unjustified confusion and hardship. It is evident to us that sporadically applied religious exceptions to the law have contributed to disputes in the past. Such complaints are traumatic for the individual(s) and families concerned. That they may occur during a period of life when people are already under stress intensifies our concerns. The problems are not ameliorated by proposals that those who are denied services may simply turn to an alternative provider. In practice this may be impossible and would be invariably difficult and distressing.

For a World Reconciled

Uniting Church in Australia, National Assembly

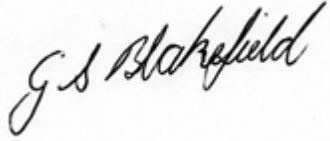
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For the above reasons we urge that the *Bill* be amended so as not to retain exceptions that allow discrimination on the basis of sexuality, gender or intersex status for religious agencies which receive Commonwealth funding.

Yours faithfully,



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Revd. Glenda S Blakefield
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