To the Senate Inquiry Committee,

I am writing to express my grave concern regarding the proposed Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill. Whilst I am in favour of society having certain safeguards for human rights and protection from discrimination, it appears that these proposed changes have crossed the line from reason to foolishness or – dare I say it – even insanity.

It seems ridiculous to me to define discrimination as behaviour that "offends or insults". Might not we all be called to account for that? The reality of a world where we are not all clones is that we think and behave differently. And behaving differently means there is every chance another could be offended, even if that were not our intention. What would stop a doctor from making a discrimination complaint against a patient who elects not to vaccinate their child, on the basis that their choice offends her by not following her medical guidance? What would stop a father lodging a claim because they are insulted by a movie that portrays fathers as inept? What would stop one spouse charging the other with discrimination because of an unfavourable comment let loose in the heat of an argument? What would stop all our politicians from being charged with discrimination because their parliamentary behaviour – or even their policies – offend and insult those of other political persuasions?! It seems to me that such a definition opens the way for an increased number of vexatious claims which will either clog the channels of justice at best or, at worst, lead to many decent people being vilified and unfairly sentenced/fined.

Secondly, this bill fails to satisfactorily answer the question of how the right to non-discrimination is balanced with other human rights, such as the rights to religious freedom and freedom of association.

Thirdly, this bill seems to operate under the presumption of guilty until proven innocent by moving the onus of proving there was no unlawful discrimination to the respondent.

Finally, I am concerned that the protections to religious freedom, known as "exceptions", are to be reviewed every three years. Such a clause troubles me. It appears that it is not assumed that certain exceptions are valid and thus can be written permanently into the law. Rather, it seems to open up the distinct possibility that those exceptions could be removed and religious bodies and educational institutions are being lulled into a false sense of security with this proposed bill.

The current bill has certainly been responsible for some highly inappropriate claims being allowed and thus is indeed in need of an overhaul. However, the proposed changes are not a move toward greater reason and common sense and true justice but rather are a move toward an Australia that I would not be proud of, in which every citizen would live in fear that anything they do or say might be used against them. I urge you to go back to the drawing board and reconsider the wording and intention of this bill.