Dear Sir / Madam,

I wish to express some concerns regarding this Bill.

Firstly, the reversal of the onus of proof I believe would encourage vindictive and vexatious claims of discrimination. This occurred in the 'Catch the Fire Ministries' case in Victoria. Although the alleged vilifiers were finally vindicated in the Victorian Supreme Court of Appeal, the vexatious claim and the reverse onus of proof caused much stress and expense. It appears to me that this Bill, if passed, will provide an unnecessary boost to lawyers' coffers. A citizen of this country should not be sent bankrupt trying to defend himself / herself against someone who wants to vindictively bring a discrimination action which they don't even have to prove. Even a murderer is entitled to a presumption of innocence!

While I applaud action to minimise offending others because of their religious beliefs, this needs to be completely fair. As a Christian, I am offended whenever someone uses the name of Jesus as a swear word in the workplace. This would surely be a S.19 'unfavourable treatment'. Will this bill prevent that sort of offence? I think not. The courts would not cope with the volume of complaints.

Is it possible that there might even be an anti-Christian bias in the framing of this Bill? I believe that an employer would not be able to be able to follow his religious convictions in refusing to employ a homosexual. So how is the offence caused to the homosexual greater than the offence caused to the Christian (or even a Muslim) employer? And what sort of a crazy employment landscape is this Bill seeking to create where an employer cannot refuse to employ someone? No wonder small business confidence is low.

The Bill as it stands is another example of political correctness gone mad, or taking a sledge hammer to crack a walnut. Freedom of speech would also be severely impaired.

I am certain that 'unfavourable treatments' can be dealt with in more reasonable, less draconian ways.

Section 21 of the Bill is straight out of Orwell's 'Animal farm' where all animals were equal, but some were more equal than others.... 'Special measures to achieve equality are not discrimination'. What kind of 'equality' is that, where a citizen can receive 'unfavourable treatment' to make another citizen equal? Do you know how stupid that sounds to this voter?

I observe that the current government has a minister whose portfolios include 'Deregulation'. This is a laudable aim, and may Parliament seek wherever possible to deregulate rather than what this Bill seeks to do, which is to regulate and restrict free speech and freedom of religion.

Yours sincerely,

Marcel Smith