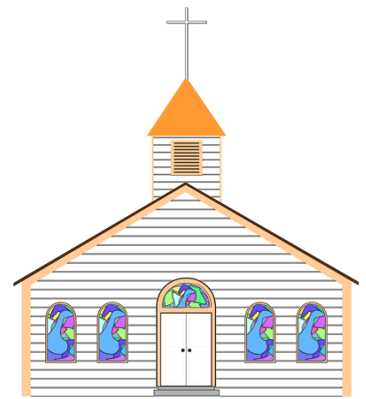


Do you want the Equal Opportunity Commissioner to investigate your church or school ...

even if no one has made a complaint?



The **Equal Opportunity Bill 2010** was crunched through the Victorian Legislative Assembly on 25 March 2010, just 15 days after it was introduced by Attorney Rob Hulls. The Bill could be debated in the Legislative Council **anytime after parliament resumes on 13 April 2010**.

If passed, the Bill would empower the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to **launch an investigation into** any organisation – including **your local church, Christian school or other Christian ministry** – even if it has never received a complaint about the organisation from anyone.

Once an investigation is launched, any person summoned by the Commission **must answer any questions asked** and **must produce any documents** demanded by the Commission.

What could the Commission be looking for?

The Commission could be searching for evidence that the church or school or ministry is not **employing enough people** of diverse religious beliefs (eg Moslems, Buddhists and Scientologists) or diverse sexual orientations (homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals) or gender identities (men who dress and act like women; women who dress and act like men) or who engage in various lawful sexual activities (such as fornication, promiscuity, adultery, sodomy, prostitution).

But aren't there religious exemptions in the Bill?

There are some exemptions. However, the onus is on a church, school or ministry to **prove to the satisfaction of the Commission that it is an inherent requirement of a particular job** that people of certain characteristics be excluded. It may be very hard to persuade the Commission that the maths teacher at a Christian school must be a believing Christian living a morally upright life. The current Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner Helen Szoke has queried why anyone should be concerned that a physical education teacher at a Christian school is a practising homosexual, for example.

If the Commission finds against the church, school or ministry, it could issue a compliance notice **ordering a change in employment policy** and forcing the school to hire people to meet the diversity targets set by the Commission. Any appeal against this order would be very costly, with no guarantee of success. This Bill represents a very serious threat to freedom of religion in Victoria.

What can we do?

Find **each of your five Legislative Council members overleaf**. Click on the email address link, enter your message - including your name and address, then send. Information about Legislative Council members is also available at: <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/handbook/menupage.cfm?menuId=1>

Politely ask each MP to vote against the Equal Opportunity Bill 2010.

You could also say, in your own words, things like:

- you oppose **any** expansion of power for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission;
- you oppose **any** reduction of the religious exemptions available under current law;
- giving the Equal Opportunity Commission powers to investigate without a complaint is dangerous;
- religious freedom is meaningless if Christians are forced to act against their deeply held beliefs;
- churches should be free to employ people who uphold the beliefs and practices of that church;
- Christian schools should be free to employ people who share the religious beliefs the school was established to promote;
- people whose beliefs or practices are at odds with those of a church or Christian school have no right to demand employment at that church or school.

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See list of MPs overleaf ...

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