



To the Commissioners

Victorian Law Reform Commission

Melbourne, Victoria

Re: Review of the Act – Response to the Question: “Could the Act’s operation and effectiveness be improved? If so, how?”

Dear Commissioners,

I write in response to the question:

“Could the Act’s operation and effectiveness be improved? If so, how?”

From a fundamental Christian worldview, the Act’s operation and effectiveness can indeed be improved—but only by restoring and strengthening protections for religious freedom and freedom of speech.

1. Broadening investigation and enforcement powers risks further eroding religious freedom

Any attempt to broaden investigative or enforcement powers would likely intensify concerns already present within faith communities. Expansive powers risk creating a climate of uncertainty and fear among pastors, churches, Christian schools, parents, and faith-based counsellors who uphold historic Christian teaching on gender and sexuality.

When legislation extends into prayer, pastoral conversations, or the teaching of religious doctrine, it moves beyond protecting individuals from harm and into regulating belief and conscience. This risks undermining pluralism in a democratic society. The effectiveness of the Act will not be improved by expanding state oversight into voluntary religious practice; rather, it may diminish trust and cooperation between faith communities and the law.

2. Religious freedom is already harmed under the Act

From a biblical Christian perspective, the Act already harms religious freedom because it does not provide meaningful protection for those who hold traditional Christian beliefs regarding gender and sexuality.

Historic Christian doctrine affirms that:

- God created humanity male and female.
- Marriage is between one man and one woman.
- Christians are called to lovingly teach repentance, transformation, and holiness according to Scripture.

If the Act restricts prayer, pastoral care, or counselling that is freely sought and willingly given, it effectively marginalises orthodox Christian belief. It creates an imbalance in which affirming certain views is protected, while expressing or teaching biblical convictions may be subject to sanction.

A law that protects identity but fails to equally protect conscience does not achieve true fairness or balance.

3. The Act can only be improved by restoring religious freedom and freedom of speech

The only meaningful way to improve the Act's operation is to explicitly safeguard:

- The freedom to preach and teach a biblical sexual ethic.
- The freedom to pray with and for individuals who voluntarily request prayer.
- The freedom to provide pastoral counselling consistent with sincerely held religious beliefs.
- The rights of parents to guide their children according to their faith.

Clear distinctions must be made between coercive or abusive conduct (which should rightly be prohibited) and consensual religious expression or pastoral support. Without

such clarity, the Act risks suppressing lawful and peaceful religious practice.

An improved Act would:

- Explicitly protect voluntary religious conversations and prayer.
- Provide clear protections for religious institutions operating according to their doctrines.
- Affirm freedom of speech in matters of moral and theological conviction.

In conclusion, the Act's effectiveness will only be strengthened if it restores a proper balance—protecting individuals from genuine harm while also safeguarding the fundamental freedoms of religion and speech. A pluralistic society must make room for deeply held religious convictions, even where disagreement exists.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours faithfully,

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