

16/10/2025

DEBATE

**Antidiscrimination Bill
(Serial 28)**

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Mr Deputy Speaker, I understand that there are changes to this law that are significant but that it does not revert to the laws from 2022. Instead, this Bill brings changes to Labor's amendment that water down protections that were created in 2022.

Section 20A currently prohibits conduct in a public place that is likely to offend, insult or humiliate a person or people because of an attribute. This Bill amends section 20A and removes 'offend, insult and humiliate' and replaces it with 'incite hatred towards, serious contempt for or severe ridicule of'. This waters down the intentions of the 2022 changes that the Labor government made. In 2025, we need stronger protections. We need both layers that the Labor Party brought in 2022, and we need the changes that the CLP is bringing now, but we also need to take the breaking of these laws much more seriously. If the CLP government is to bring a Bill to amend the Act once again, it should have been done properly with a thorough review and consultation.

This Bill should have been sent to the scrutiny committee for community consultations. Today, in the Northern Territory, we can feel high levels of discrimination. We know that there are serious and entrenched uses of discrimination in the NT, and many people feel that these problems are growing. The Anti-Discrimination Commission is tasked with the job of investigating discrimination, and there must be real consequences that lead people and institutions away from following toxic cultures to become normal to allow vilification and highly offensive and damaging language and behaviour to occur.

Many people in this Chamber will understand the impact of discrimination at a personal level. A person is deeply harmed by offensive behaviours of discrimination. I personally have felt this deep hurt, so it is important that we protect people by creating laws that set a high standard, that say discrimination will not be tolerated, and penalties will be enforced.

For this reason, I cannot support this Bill. I agree with the vilification laws bringing the NT law into line with other jurisdictions, but other jurisdictions such as Queensland also have made serious vilification a criminal offence, and this is missing from this Bill. I understand that since 2022 there have been only three complaints made to the commissioner in relation to public conduct. That was the offence of humiliating or intimidating. The implementation of this law has not opened the floodgates to numerous complaints or shut down free speech, as the CLP suggested it would. I would like to see both the offensive behaviour and vilification sections adopted within the Act.

I would also like to see the government sending a clear message that discrimination is not okay. There is a current message coming from the government that it does not want to infringe on freedom of speech and people should be allowed to be offensive in public and not be concerned about it.

This message began in 2022 when the CLP opposed the Labor Bill. Over three years later, we can clearly see that the Bill was okay and it did not impact on freedom of speech. Despite this, the CLP has chosen to amend the Act. The story it tells is about freedom of speech and the freedom to offend people, but story should really be about the importance of protecting people. This government is yet to begin talking about the safety and protection of all people in our communities.

I will speak briefly about new section 35B. This section inserts an exemption for work in religious education settings. I am not opposed to religious schools being able to recruit staff who align with the faith of the school community, but I also believe that they can employ people of any faith. I am opposed to the idea that any school might discriminate against people for other reasons and I hope that section 35B(2) would not allow this to happen.

I have concerns that the schools may take this section further by saying that they will not allow a divorced person, a single parent teacher, a gay teacher or an Aboriginal teacher who still participates in traditional ceremonies. As I understand section 35B may allow pathways for this, and that is concerning. As a Christian, these examples go against the teachings of Christianity that I understand. I understand that Jesus teaches that we must be accepting and compassionate towards one another and that it is not our place to judge. I have concerns that section 35B may discriminate against people for who they are and cause harm.

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Things have changed from 2022 to 2025, and this Bill was an opportunity to improve the laws while it has retained some of the intention of the Labor Bill in 2022. Overall, it has failed to bring the strong improvements that we need to see in 2025.

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