

## Tax threat to religious schools

**The Coalition has accused Labor of “mounting an attack” on religious charities and schools after a draft Productivity Commission report proposed eliminating crucial tax deductions for donors.**

The report proposes ending deductible gift recipient (DGR) status for religious education (RE) providers and school building funds for primary, secondary and childcare institutions, arguing that this fails to provide a “net community benefit” despite schools having this fundraising since 1954.

“This proposed school building tax is a direct, ideological attack on independent and faith-based schools and must immediately be ruled out by the Albanese Government,” said Shadow Minister for Education Sarah Henderson.

Labor spokesman for charities, Andrew Leigh, said that the Commission’s recommendations were “not government policy”, but did not rule out any of the draft proposals.

The proposals would be “catastrophic for low fee-paying non-government schools”, according to Ms Henderson, a former teacher, because they “depend on DGR status to construct new school buildings and other vital infrastructure.”

“With the vast majority of students at non-government schools from low and middle-income families, this proposal is another cruel blow for struggling families,” Henderson said.

A report by Independent Schools Australia states that 86% of the sector’s capital funding comes from

parents and donations from the broader school community.

According to 2021 ACNC data cited by the Commission, over 3500 religious and religious education groups with DGR status received a median \$5000 in DGR funds, totalling up to \$800m in donations.

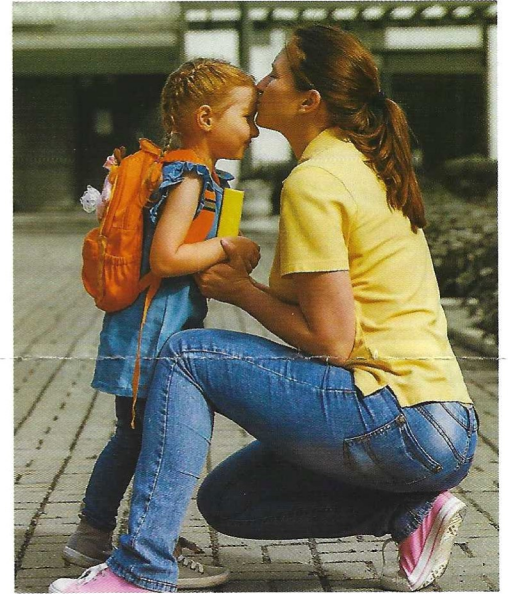
“These proposals would force Christian schools to increase school fees to cover capital costs, lower or cancel spending on new schools, or not increase enrolment intakes,” said FamilyVoice National Director Peter Downie.

“The Commission proposes that ‘governments may wish to have more control’, via direct funding, over ‘which activities and which schools receive taxpayer support for capital works, so government support can be allocated in a more equitable manner based on need.’

“The reality is that faith-based schools are performing well and government schools are failing students. More government control over faith-based schools is not the answer,” said Downie.

Shadow Treasurer Angus Taylor said that the proposals in this report exemplified a government with “the wrong priorities”.

“Rather than address cost-of-living, Labor is attacking non-government



*Independent schools are 86% funded from parents and the community*

and religious schools. Dr Chalmers and Education Minister Jason Clare must rule out this recommendation and rule it out urgently,” Mr Taylor said.

## Families in ‘free fall’

**Urgently restored social institutions are needed as families are in free fall, evidenced by extraordinary levels of suspected child abuse and neglect, according to FamilyVoice Queensland State Director Andrew McColl.**

“Reports about growing rates of suspected child abuse and neglect are evidence of family collapse that can only be described as free fall, necessitating urgent reform of social institutions such as the family and the church,” Andrew McColl said.

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# Families in 'free fall'

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According to *The Australian* newspaper (3/1/2024), mandatory reported incidents of suspected child abuse and neglect in Australia have reached levels beyond the ability of social services to investigate.

"The solution to these growing problems is not bigger government, but a restoration of the family, enriched by the Christian faith," he said.

"The role of churches to marry young couples and nurture their offspring is urgently needed to stem the growing problem of abuse and neglect," he said.

"Calls to spend more money on this growing problem are failing to identify causation, including family dysfunction, the growing number of single parents, the failure of fathers, and the loss of confidence in the institution of marriage," Andrew McColl said.

"In a former generation, young couples married in church ceremonies and the resultant families benefited from participating in faith communities," Andrew McColl said.

"The protection given through Christian covenanting and the church-based nurture provided to young couples and their children is now dispensed with, as the culture thinks it can ignore its own heritage."

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 'PATCHWORK REMEDY'

**A proposal of the federal ALP government to ban expressions of extreme hatred to assist the passage of a possible national religious discrimination act, is "less than ideal", according to FamilyVoice SA director David d'Lima.**

"FamilyVoice Australia obviously opposes any expression of extreme hatred, and we want faith-based institutions to enjoy freedom, but we can only be cautious about this patchwork remedy to a discrimination problem that governments should never have created," he said.

"Churches, Christian schools and faith-based charities currently operate under exemptions from anti-discrimination legislation, so they can maintain the integrity of their staffing and ethos, but that really categorises such groups as ones that must grudgingly be tolerated, and not celebrated."

According to federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus, the ALP government will include measures to protect people from hate speech and vilification based on their faith, when it seeks to enact religious discrimination laws later this year.

But FamilyVoice Australia has consistently opposed the attempt to solve social disagreements through anti-discrimination responses. FamilyVoice has especially found fault with the exemption model that tolerates choice by faith-based

groups that wish only to hire staff who affirm their agreement with the doctrines and ethical practices those organisations uphold.

"Anti-discrimination laws have multiplied greatly across the jurisdictions, as we've also seen a proliferation of human rights agencies to administer and enforce those laws," David d'Lima said.

"Exemptions are better than nothing, but they do nothing to remedy the real problem of anti-discrimination legislation.

"Organisations that are applauding the ALP proposal as a move towards a more robust federal discrimination bill should realise that what governments give they can also take away," David d'Lima said.

"Much better for Christian schools, churches, charities and other groups to regain their historic common law right to keep their own house in order without subjugation under anti-discrimination laws.

"Gaining what might only be a temporary statist exemption is no real solution."

## EXTRACTS

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