



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **One step closer to simpler, fairer human rights and anti-discrimination laws with the release of the Senate Committee's report.**

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee has recommended that the draft *Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012* should be prioritised by the Government for introduction and passage through the parliament by the end of the June sitting this year.

Community Legal Centres welcome the Committee's report which also recommends clarifying the definitions of intersex and gender identity, including protections against discrimination based on irrelevant criminal record and domestic violence, and removing religious exemptions which would allow religious organisations to discriminate against individuals in the provision of services.

The Committee also recommends the removal of paragraph 19(2)(b) from the draft because of fears from all sides that the paragraph might impact on freedom of expression.

"The Committee's report confirms the importance of reforming our anti-discrimination laws to make fairer, more efficient, accessible and clear for clients, employers and the community," said Michael Smith, National Convenor, NACLC.

"The Committee's report shows that these new laws would make it simpler, clearer and easier for all people to know what is against the law. The Committee highlights that the shifting burden of proof would reduce costs for respondents and that making people responsible for their own legal costs would improve access to justice for vulnerable people," said Mr Smith. "The Committee also welcomes the long overdue, historic reform of protecting against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity."

NACLC and KLC also welcome the Committee practical recommendations to improve the Bill. "People should not be able to discriminate against someone because they are a victim of domestic violence or if they have an irrelevant criminal record. Religious organisations that are publicly funded to provide services to the community should not be able to discriminate either," said Anna Cody, Director of Kingsford Legal Centre. "The Committee has also provided a neat solution to addressing freedom of speech concerns with the Bill."

"We welcome the Government's open and transparent consultation process to ensure that the new anti-discrimination laws are fair and efficient. We urge the Government to implement the Committee's recommendations and prioritise making this Bill law before June," said Ms Cody.

"This Bill would significantly improve fairness and access to justice for all Australians. We all deserve a fairer and simpler anti-discrimination system," concluded Mr Smith.

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