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Union rejects Catholic Archbishop of Sydney's threat to close schools

The IEU rejects Catholic Archbishop of Sydney Anthony Fisher's alarmist comments about closing Catholic schools in protest over proposed changes to federal anti-discrimination laws.

The Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch represents more than 32,000 teachers and professional, administrative, operational and support staff in non-government schools, including Catholic schools, throughout NSW and the ACT.

Most employers cannot lawfully discriminate due to an employee's sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy or accessing fertility treatments. Yet faith-based schools still have special exemptions allowing treatment of staff that would be prohibited in the wider community.

"Archbishop Anthony Fisher would like to hold onto these unjust exemptions, and he has threatened to close Catholic schools if employees gain stronger employment protections," said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"The Archbishop's stance is at odds with the federal government's longstanding election commitment to protect both students and staff from discrimination," Matthews said.

"Catholic diocesan schools receive more than 80 per cent of their income from government funding. This is completely different to the closure of six Catholic schools in Goulburn in 1962 – at that time, Catholic schools did not receive any government funding.

"No one is trying to stop Catholic schools from being Catholic or teaching the Catholic faith. But once employed, teachers and other school staff should not be at risk of losing their jobs because they divorce, remarry, or use contraception or IVF services."

IEU members have campaigned for years for commonsense employment protections.

"Teachers, school leaders, and school support staff have shared heartbreaking stories with the union of the discrimination they've endured at work due to their sexual orientation, for accessing fertility treatments, for a change to their relationship status or because of pregnancy," Matthews said.

"Such treatment would be unlawful in every other industry. It is unwelcome in today's workplace."

The IEU calls on the Catholic church to participate in real and sensible negotiations about proposed changes to federal anti-discrimination laws. Teachers and support staff in Catholic schools deserve the same employment protections as the rest of the community.

"Schools and communities of faith can still thrive without the need to discriminate," Matthews said.

Contacts

Carol Matthews, Secretary, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch 0418 272 902

Media: Monica Crouch, 0486 046 975, monica@ieu.asn.au

The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

Authorised by Carol Matthews, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary