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Union backs MP's call to scrap exemptions to anti-discrimination law

The union representing teachers and support staff in non-government schools in NSW and the ACT backs Sydney Independent MP Alex Greenwich's call during Mardi Gras to scrap religious exemptions that make it legal to discriminate against school staff and students.

"We welcome Mr Greenwich's commitment to end the exemptions that permit non-government schools to target and punish LGBTQIA+ teachers and students," said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"However, the problem is even worse than Mr Greenwich has identified."

At present, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act allows faith-based schools to discriminate against people because of their gender, disability, sexual orientation, transgender identity, marital status, pregnancy and even if they undergo fertility treatment.

"Teachers, support staff and school leaders have shared heartbreaking stories with the IEU of the discrimination they've experienced in the workplace," Matthews said.

"This includes teachers in Catholic schools being excluded from leaderships positions if they are divorced and staff in Christian schools sacked for allegedly being in a de facto or same-sex relationship."

Matthews said staff who don't meet these outdated rules are constantly at risk of disciplinary action, forcing them to hide personal details from their employer.

The NSW government is currently reviewing the state's anti-discrimination law, but there are no guarantees this long-running review will recommend protections for teachers and school staff in faith-based schools. Nor is there any guarantee the NSW government will legislate recommendations arising from the review.

"Discrimination is unwelcome in schools and would be unlawful in every other industry," Matthews said.

"School employers have nothing to fear from modern community standards – they can still thrive without the need to discriminate. Changes to the anti-discrimination law could still allow religious schools to build communities of faith central to their ethos and character."

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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.

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