



Thursday 10th February

Dear siblings, friends and allies,

This week has been a difficult and painful week as the Religious Discrimination Bill was debated and our lives as LGBTQIA+ people and people of faith were challenged, questioned and degraded by media and those elected to represent us in the parliament. We are particularly aware of the impact this week has had on young people in schools and our trans and gender diverse community.

Uniting Network has written submissions opposing the bill, and Jason Masters and Elliot Nicholas, on behalf of the Network, provided evidence and shared their stories to a Senate hearing alongside the Uniting Church Assembly last month. Countless members, ministers and congregations have spoken out to their local MP's, asking that the bill be scrapped and the lives of those who are vulnerable and in minority communities be protected.

Overnight Wednesday the House of Representatives voted on the bill and it was passed with only one amendment. We woke up to the news of this being passed and sent to the Senate, where our last hope for amendments would remain. By early afternoon, the Religious Discrimination Bill had been shelved and would not go to the Senate. But the harm has already been done and many are left feeling uncertain for when and what will come next.

The public discourse and political climate this week has left many people in our community feeling vulnerable, confused and scared. It is important that we reach out to one another and check in and offer support. We encourage you to seek professional support through trained mental health practitioners or contact any of the crisis numbers listed below. If you need any support to access these services, please get in touch with us at Uniting Network and we will try to connect you with relevant services in your area.

We want to reiterate that you are a loved and essential part of God's intended human diversity and we are thankful for your contribution to the Christian community. Finally, we commend to you the pastoral statement made by the Uniting Church Assembly Rev Sharon Hollis.
<https://uniting.church/pastoral-statement-religious-discrimination/>

Yours,

Nicole Mugford and Jason Masters
Convenors - Uniting Network



If you need help or support you can contact one of the following services for phone or online support:

QLIFE: Specialist LGTBTIQA+ support service. Free service, Australia-wide, 3pm - midnight, every day.

Phone: 1800 184 527

Visit: qlife.org.au

Beyond Blue: The Beyond Blue Support Service provides advice and support via telephone 24/7 (just call 1300 22 4636), daily web chat (between 3pm–12am) and email (with a response provided within 24 hours). <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Lifeline: Phone 13 11 14 available 24 hours / 7 days - Australia's largest crisis support line. Anyone in Australia can speak to a trained Crisis Supporter over the phone, any time of the day or night.

Lifeline Text: 0477 13 11 14 available nightly - Australia's first SMS-based Crisis Support service, any person in Australia can receive support from a Crisis Supporter by text message every night. <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Headspace: Phone 1800 650 890

Free telephone service that supports young people aged between 12 and 25 and their families going through a tough time.

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

A free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.