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Yes can be made public

*Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023* is to protect “the safety and wellbeing of Australians,” it appears to be an attempt to reclaim the information ground lost to social media platforms.

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. As a concerned citizen, I firmly believe that the proposed legislation threatens the very essence of free speech and undermines the principles of a free and democratic society.

In a world where digital platforms have become integral to our daily lives, the issue of free speech has taken centre stage. It is the cornerstone of any democratic society, empowering citizens to voice their opinions, express their beliefs, and hold those in power accountable. However, recent discussions surrounding the introduction of a federal government-controlled digital and social media monitoring system in Australia have sparked concerns about the potential erosion of this fundamental right.

Free speech is the lifeblood of a democratic society, fostering an environment that encourages open debate, diversity of thought, and the exchange of ideas. It enables citizens to challenge prevailing norms, question authority, and advocate for change. Through free speech, marginalised voices are amplified, and societal progress is made possible. By stifling free speech, we risk silencing dissenting opinions and limiting the scope of our collective growth.

The proposal for a federal government-controlled monitoring system over digital and social media platforms raises legitimate concerns about the potential infringement on free speech. Granting a centralised authority unchecked control over monitoring and regulating online speech opens the door to abuse of power, censorship, and the suppression of dissenting views.

At its core, the debate surrounding free speech is not only about digital platforms or regulations—it is about the vitality of democracy itself. Free speech acts as a safeguard against authoritarianism, allowing citizens to challenge those in power and demand accountability. History has shown that the erosion of free speech often paves the way for the erosion of other civil liberties. It is crucial that we remain vigilant and actively advocate for the preservation of this fundamental right.

The broad powers granted to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) raise significant alarm. The lack of clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms for determining what constitutes misinformation and disinformation is deeply troubling. Who holds the authority to define these terms, and how can we ensure that this power is not abused for political or ideological purposes?

The Bill's inclusion of the term "serious harm" as a criterion for intervention is ambiguous and subject to interpretation. The potential for government agencies to decide what ideas or information are likely to cause "serious harm" raises concerns about the suppression of dissenting views and stifling of robust public discourse. It is crucial to remember that the foundations of a healthy democracy rely on open debate and the exploration of diverse perspectives.

Furthermore, the exclusion of certain forms of content, such as "professional news content" and government-authorised content, from the purview of the ACMA's powers raises questions about equal treatment and impartiality. It is essential to create a level playing field where all voices, regardless of their source, can contribute to the democratic conversation.

As a citizen, I value the freedom to access and share a wide range of opinions, even those that may be controversial or challenge prevailing narratives. The potential

penalties outlined in the Bill, including substantial fines for individuals and corporations, create a climate of fear and self-censorship, which is antithetical to the principles of an open and democratic society.

In conclusion

Digital and social media platforms have revolutionised the way we communicate and share information. They have democratised the public discourse, giving a voice to individuals who were previously unheard. These platforms have become invaluable tools for organising social movements, advocating for social justice, and shining a light on societal issues. Overregulation threatens to stifle these positive aspects, curbing the very essence of free speech that makes these platforms powerful agents for change.

I strongly urge the government to reconsider the proposed legislation and engage in a more inclusive and transparent process that includes thorough public consultation. Protecting Australians from harm should not come at the cost of sacrificing our fundamental democratic values.

I encourage you to genuinely consider the opinions and perspectives of the citizens you represent.