

Re: Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

My name is Katrina and I would like to express my opinion regarding this bill, which I understand is aimed at social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. It also forces them to filter out any information the Government deems to be misinformation and disinformation.

In my view, this Bill represents a massive threat to freedom of speech and freedom of expression. If it passes, any opinion that the Government does not agree with is suppressed, even if that opinion is true. We have seen versions of it in the past.

- Earlier this year, the Department of Home Affairs ("the Department") and social media platforms struck a deal where the Department would ask the platforms to remove any posts that were deemed misinformation or disinformation. During the pandemic, it requested the censorship of 4,213 posts, including valid opinions, jokes, memes, and any posts made by individuals who have little as 20 followers.
- The medical regulator, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, prevented doctors and health care workers from expressing valid concerns regarding COVID-19 protocols and injections. This undermined a patient's right to informed consent, eroding the public's trust in the medical profession.
- A video of a New South Wales Member of Parliament giving his maiden speech to parliament was removed from YouTube as it contained "medical misinformation that contradicted local health authorities".

I do not agree with the clause that federal, state, and local governments, as well as the mainstream media, would be exempt from the bill. This would not only allow the government and media to spread misinformation and disinformation themselves and individuals would not be able to challenge their views, it also sends a clear message that politicians are above the law.

The Government had made an election promise to strengthen our democracy. Instead, it has continued the unjust persecution of whistleblowers, broken an election promise that the hearings in the National Anti-Corruption Commission will be made public, and now it has took it upon itself to pursue this abandoned policy introduced by the previous Coalition Government. I call on the minister for communications, Michelle Rowland, to withdraw this dangerous and unnecessary bill and draw her attention on the serious harm caused by Australian children who access online pornography.

Giving my grave concerns raised above, this bill should not be passed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Katrina Hobson

