

Dear Consultation,

Please accept my submission concerning the Online Safety Bill exposure draft.

I agree with much of the content of this bill, particularly its protections for children, but I would like to draw your attention to section 7, which makes it a criminal offence to post something online that “an ordinary reasonable person” would regard as being “menacing, harassing or offensive”.

This definition is dangerously broad, and section 8 of the Bill, titled “Determining whether material is offensive,” doesn’t help matters, because its requirements are of the most basic kind and it provides no limitations or protections.

I am deeply concerned with this aspect of the Bill because it will greatly restrict free speech. Even the Gospel, the basis of the founding religion of our nation, could be deemed offensive because it rightly testifies that every man and woman is a sinner and that we all have broken God’s law and rejected our Creator.

But the Gospel is actually good news, not bad news. Because God loved us so much, He did not want us to face our just punishment, but sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world to be tortured and to die on a cross to take the punishment in our place and He now invites all to come to Him and accept salvation as a free gift.

However, the Bible also tells us that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God,” and so those who reject this free gift often despise it and find it offensive.

To protect free speech and freedom of religion, I therefore urge you to modify section 7 of the Online Safety Bill, so it does not criminalize the sharing of material online that may offend, even material as innocuous as personal faith or parts of Scripture.

Thank you again for allowing me to offer suggestions on how to improve this bill.

Yours faithfully,

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