

Respect at Work and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2024

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Submission to the Queensland Government Inquiry on the Introduction of *Respect at Work and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2024* from Soroptimist International of Brisbane Inc

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

- **Soroptimist International of Brisbane Inc (SI Brisbane)** welcomes this opportunity to provide input to the development of the ***Respect at Work and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2024***. Our membership base consists of business, community, and professional women who advocate for all women and girls. As part of the global advocacy organisation, **Soroptimist International (SI)**, our network of around 66,000 members in 118 countries works at local, national, and international levels to **educate, empower and enable** opportunities for all women and girls. Over a century ago, SI established a women's organisation that proliferated throughout the globe. Our purpose is similar to the **Sustainable Development Goal SDG5 for gender equality**.
- As an organisation deeply committed to the protection and empowerment of all women and girls in our community, we advocate for legislative reforms that safeguard their rights and ensure their safety. Our position aligns with key international human rights instruments such as the UN Charter for Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), allied conventions and treaties, as well as relevant Australian and Queensland policies and legislation.
- Economic empowerment, education and training, gender budgeting, and equal distribution of resources and services are critical to the advancement of women, the achievement of gender equality, and the realisation of women's human rights.

- There is still a long way to go to recognise the role for women in leadership in all sectors of the economy from community leadership to the involvement of women on the Boards of major corporate companies. Cultural attitudes in many communities mean that women are unable to hold local leadership roles, while at corporate Board level there is still an even bigger gender gap. Workplaces must be safe, enabling and empowering spaces for all workers, including women at all job levels. All measures must be taken to ensure places of work are free from all forms of violence as per the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190.
- Based on the introduction of the bill, this submission highlights critical issues we identified that are impacting women and girls in Queensland. Our recommendations aim to enhance protections, support, and legal frameworks to create safer and more equitable workplaces for all women, including those from marginalised groups.

CRITICAL ISSUES AND THEIR IMPACT

1. Prevalence of Workplace Harassment

The Respect@Work Report (2020) highlighted the widespread nature of sexual harassment in Australian workplaces, a situation that remains pressing in Queensland. Workplace harassment creates hostile environments, negatively affecting women's mental health, career progression, and overall well-being, with marginalised women often facing compounded discrimination.

2. Barriers to Reporting and Support

The existing timeframe for lodging complaints and the limited support services available to women discourage reporting of harassment and discrimination. This leads to underreporting and insufficient redress for victims, particularly among marginalised groups such as Indigenous women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, older women, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities.

3. Need for Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Protections

Current laws do not fully address intersectional discrimination or the specific needs of marginalised women. This results in inadequate legal protection and recourse for women who experience multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening Harassment Protections

Implement mandatory gender sensitivity, intersectionality, and harassment prevention training programs for all employees and management within Queensland workplaces. Training should address the specific challenges faced by marginalised groups to foster a more inclusive and safer workplace culture.

2. Supporting Survivors of Sexual Harassment

Establish dedicated support services, including legal aid and counselling, specifically tailored for survivors from marginalised groups. Marginalised women often face additional barriers to accessing support, and tailored services can provide more effective assistance.

3. Enhancing Employer Accountability

Introduce regular audits of workplace compliance with anti-discrimination and harassment policies by an independent body, with a focus on the experiences of vulnerable groups. Regular audits ensure ongoing compliance and proactive identification of issues, particularly those affecting these groups.

4. Broadening the Scope of Protected Attributes

Include explicit protections for intersectional identities, such as race, disability, and LGBTIQ+ status, in anti-discrimination laws. Intersectional protections address the complex nature of discrimination that affects women from diverse backgrounds more acutely.

5. Increasing Support for Parental Leave

Expand parental leave policies to include additional paid leave options and support for childcare, particularly for single mothers and low-income families. Enhanced parental leave policies promote work-life balance and gender equality, benefiting both men and women, and are crucial for single mothers and those from low-income backgrounds.

6. Improving Legal Processes for Survivors

Develop a streamlined, trauma-informed legal process for handling cases of workplace harassment and discrimination, with specific considerations for marginalised groups. A streamlined process reduces the burden on survivors and ensures that their cases are handled with sensitivity and efficiency, particularly for those facing additional barriers.

7. Addressing Systemic Issues

Create a task force to identify and address systemic issues in workplaces, including power imbalances and cultural factors that contribute to harassment, with a focus on marginalised women. A task force can provide targeted recommendations and interventions to tackle the root causes of workplace harassment and discrimination, particularly for vulnerable women.

8. Community Education and Public Awareness Campaigns

Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the broader community about the changes in the law and the importance of gender equality in the workplace, with specific messaging for specific groups. Public awareness campaigns can shift societal attitudes and reduce tolerance for workplace harassment and discrimination, particularly for women who face additional barriers.

CONCLUSION

- The ***Respect at Work and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2024*** represents a crucial step towards addressing workplace harassment and discrimination in Queensland. However, to create genuinely inclusive and safe workplaces, it is essential to adopt comprehensive measures that specifically consider the needs of marginalised women. By implementing the above recommendations, we can ensure that all women in Queensland are protected, supported, and empowered in their professional environments.



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