

Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill 2026

Submission No: 22
Submission By: Settlement Services International
Publication: Making the submission and your name public

Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns Out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill (2026) (QLD)

February 2026

Introduction

About SSI

Settlement Services International (SSI) is a large not-for-profit organisation dedicated to creating a more inclusive society in which everyone can meaningfully contribute to social, cultural, civic and economic life.

SSI was founded in Sydney in 2000 with the aim of helping newly arrived refugees settle in Australia. Over time, our expertise in working with people from diverse cultural and linguistic (CALD) backgrounds served as the foundation for a gradual expansion into other social services and geographical areas.

In 2018, SSI merged with Queensland-based Access Community Services and opened an office in Victoria providing an extensive footprint across the eastern coast of Australia. In 2024-25, SSI supported more than 53,000 people across almost 60 programs nationally. In addition to supporting individuals and communities through the services we provide, SSI seeks to influence the systems, laws and policies that result in inequities and limit opportunities. SSI is an impact-focused organisation, whose Impact Strategy sets out our goals for an equitable, resilient, enriched, and inclusive Australia where our clients fully participate in the economic, social, civic, and cultural life.

SSI's submission

SSI welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns Out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill (2026) Inquiry. We endorse the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) submission.

We echo ECCQ's concerns that Jewish and Muslim communities in Queensland are experiencing heightened concern about antisemitism and Islamophobia. SSI cautions against moving too swiftly and we share concerns from Queensland's multicultural communities about how elements of this bill may be framed or enforced.

In particular, we echo the concerns raised by leaders from Muslim and Palestinian communities, who reject antisemitism, Islamophobia and all forms of racism or bigotry against any community, regardless of faith, ethnicity or nationality. Their concern with the Bill is not with protecting Jewish Queenslanders from harm, which they support, but with what they perceive as the risk of selective treatment of particular expressions in a way that could undermine principles of equal protection and ultimately weaken social cohesion.

Laws of this nature must be neutral in design and consistent in application across all communities. At a time of heightened national tensions, it is critical that new legislation strengthens safety and social cohesion without unintentionally deepening divisions or eroding public trust.

SSI supports laws that protect all faith communities by ensuring people are not intimidated while accessing places of worship. Attacks, harassment and vandalism directed at religious institutions have a profound impact not only on physical safety but also on community wellbeing and sense of belonging. Stronger penalties for wilful damage to places of worship and learning send a clear message that faith-based targeting will not be tolerated and that such conduct is treated as a serious offence with broad community impact.

SSI submits that legislation of this kind must be clearly framed and implemented as protecting all faith communities and all people, consistently and without discrimination, and must be accompanied by transparent guidance, community education, and mechanisms for monitoring impacts and enforcement patterns to safeguard against uneven application.

Complementary investment in community cohesion and interfaith dialogue is therefore essential. In practice, this should include genuine consultations with diverse faith and multicultural communities prior to implementation; culturally safe communication explaining what the law does and does not cover (including explicit reassurance about lawful peaceful protest and legitimate religious or cultural

symbols); and structured partnerships with faith leaders, schools, youth services and multicultural organisations to support prevention and early intervention.

While addressing hate conduct is important, the rushed expansion of criminal offences, particularly speech-based offences and potential Adult Crime, Adult Time (ACAT) classifications, carries significant unintended risks.

Broad or selectively defined speech offences risk creating a chilling effect on legitimate political, educational and cultural expression. Australian human rights bodies have consistently emphasised the need to balance hate-speech regulation with the implied freedom of political communication. If communities are uncertain about what language may attract criminal liability, individuals, particularly young people, may self-censor rather than engage in dialogue about identity, racism and geopolitics. This undermines civic participation and weakens social cohesion rather than strengthening it.

Government has a unique responsibility to act as a stabilising force in times of social strain. The way legislation is framed, consulted on and communicated can either build calm and reinforce equal protection, or deepen uncertainty and division. In this instance, the speed and limited consultation associated with the Bill have contributed to community unease and have risked undermining the very cohesion the reforms seek to strengthen.

SSI unequivocally supports strong and effective measures to address all forms of hate speech and hate conduct. However, reforms of this magnitude must be developed through careful consultations, evidence-based policy design and a clear assessment of unintended impacts.

We would ask that the Queensland government pause the passage of this bill to allow for more extensive consultation, particularly with Queensland's multicultural communities. This pause should enable meaningful, culturally informed consultation with multicultural and faith communities, youth and education sector stakeholders, and human rights experts, including sufficient timeframes for engagement and feedback. The very process of bringing diverse community leaders together for consultation has been shown to strengthen cohesion and sharing of values.

We would welcome the opportunity to work constructively and positively with the Queensland Government to ensure that measures to combat hate are effective, proportionate and consistently and fairly applied while also addressing the root causes and impacts of societal tensions where early interventions can make a lasting difference.

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Date: 17 February 2026

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