



## HUMAN RIGHTS DAY: A CALL FOR ACTION

It's time to consider South Australia's next chapter in a proud history of adopting socially progressive legislation. We need a Human Rights Act to secure the rights and freedoms that apply to all our people regardless of their background or belief, based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect.

Our State Parliament has responded to representations from hundreds of individuals and community organisations. In December last year, the Social Development Committee (SDC) announced an Inquiry into the Potential for a Human Rights Act for South Australia. The Inquiry is reviewing the effectiveness of current laws and mechanisms for protecting human rights in South Australia and any possible improvements to these mechanisms. Its report is due in the New Year.

We don't have comprehensive legal protection for human rights in Australia. Only certain human rights are protected across an inconsistent patchwork of state laws, and many human rights are not protected at all. This leaves gaping holes in human rights protection which entrenches inequality, discrimination, and the risk of rights abuse, particularly for people in vulnerable circumstances.

A clear example is evidence published in the *'Holding On To Our Future'* report released by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in May, 2024. It reveals the shocking truth that 1 in 10 Aboriginal children are in state care in SA. She found Aboriginal children are over-reported, over-investigated and over-represented in removals and long-term Guardianship orders. She wants Aboriginal family and children's rights to be better respected.

At the national level, a very extensive report from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR) was published in May this year. We now see our national parliament take the case for human rights legislation seriously. The PJCHR report strongly emphasises that all states and territories yet to do so now need to move towards introducing their own human rights legislation and recommends:

- comprehensive and effective protection of human rights in legislation, through the establishment of a Human Rights Act;
- a significant and ongoing commitment to human rights education;
- requirements for public servants to fully consider human rights in the development of legislation and policies.

Politicians, from all political perspectives, want our laws and administrative policies and actions to be respected, understood and workable. People want fair, responsible government where the public interest is the heart of decision-making. Bringing human rights into legislation, at the core of public policy, reinforces the idea that the public good is a constant goal of any administration and of all governments.

South Australians have responded to the Inquiry into the Potential for a Human Rights Act for South Australia by coming forward and calling for the legal protection of their human rights, including their right to housing, the right to equal access to health care and education. A Coalition including the Rights Resource Network South Australia, the South Australian Council of Social Service and Australian Lawyers for Human Rights has written to the Premier of SA, the Hon Peter Malinauskas, seeking a meeting in the New Year to discuss the outcomes of the Social Development Committee Inquiry. We are very hopeful that the Committee's report will recommend improving human rights provisions in our state's laws.

Today, on International Human Rights Day, this Coalition is calling for the meaningful legal protection of human rights across our state in a Human Rights Act for SA.

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