



15 November 2024

The Honourable Jacqui Lambie
Senator for Tasmania
PO Box 256
Burnie
Tasmania 7320

E: senator.lambie@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Lambie,

The World Council for Health Australia (WCH Australia) write to express our deep concerns about the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, which is set to be debated in the Senate. This Bill represents a serious threat to fundamental freedoms, including the right to free speech, and is both legally and ethically unsupportable. We strongly urge you to oppose this Bill, as it undermines the democratic principles of this great nation that we know you are deeply committed to.

As someone who has consistently spoken out for transparency and accountability, you have repeatedly raised concerns about failures within the system, particularly when the public has been misled or failed by institutions meant to serve them. Given your long-standing advocacy for transparency, I believe you will see how the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024 presents a direct threat to the values you champion.

At its core, the Bill would undermine the right to freedom of expression, a right guaranteed under Section 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Australia is a signatory. Article 19 of the ICCPR specifically safeguards the right to seek, receive, and impart information, acknowledging the importance of open debate in a democratic society.

History has shown that "truth" is not a static concept. It evolves with new evidence, perspectives, and debates. By attempting to define certain viewpoints or information as inherently false, the Bill risks entrenching political and ideological biases and stifling critical discussions on matters of public interest. This is not just an issue of policy, but of human dignity and democratic health. Free societies thrive when individuals are empowered to question prevailing narratives, including those held by governments, corporations, and media outlets.

Moreover, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has repeatedly stressed the importance of freedom of expression in maintaining a vibrant, pluralistic democracy. As stated in the Commission's 2020 submission on digital platforms, censorship laws must be narrowly tailored and transparent to avoid infringing upon the rights of individuals to express diverse viewpoints. The Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill, would give unprecedented powers to decide what constitutes truth, inviting significant overreach and the potential for abuse.

The Bill's broad powers to censor speech, particularly as it applies to "misinformation" or "disinformation," raises significant concerns about the potential for government overreach, especially when it comes to exempting the government and media from the provisions of the Bill. As you've often pointed out, when powerful institutions are not held accountable, they can operate with impunity, manipulating information to protect their interests. The proposed exemptions in this Bill would allow government and media organizations to decide what constitutes truth, while silencing voices that challenge official narratives. This undermines public trust and echoes the very issues you've raised about accountability and transparency in government and other sectors.

We urge you to reject the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024. Protecting free speech, open debate, and preserving the right to challenge prevailing views are essential to the health of our democratic society and the future of our nation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours Sincerely,



EMAIL: Admin@wch-australia.org

WEBSITE: <https://wch-australia.org>

SUBSTACK: <https://substack.com/@wchaustralia>



15 November 2024

The Honourable Fatima Payman
Senator for Western Australia
GPO Box B58
Perth
Western Australia 6838

E: senator.payman@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Payman,

The World Council for Health Australia (WCH Australia) write to express our deep concerns about the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, which is set to be debated in the Senate. This Bill represents a serious threat to fundamental freedoms, including the right to free speech, and is both legally and ethically unsupportable. We strongly urge you to oppose this Bill, as it undermines the democratic principles of this great nation that we know you are deeply committed to.

In opposing the Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, Senator Payman, given your strong commitment to social justice, equity, and the rights of marginalized communities, we urge you to consider the significant risks posed by the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, particularly in how it could disproportionately impact vulnerable groups. As someone who advocates for the rights of refugees, migrants, and women, we are sure you understand the dangers of a system that allows the government or corporate powers to define and control what constitutes “misinformation” or “disinformation.” This Bill could be used to silence voices of difference, limit free expression, and stifle the ability of marginalized communities to advocate for their rights. Moreover, in a multicultural society, it’s essential that individuals have the freedom to express their views and challenge narratives, especially when those in power may be promoting policies that harm these very communities. We believe this Bill threatens the very democratic principles you fight for, including the right to voice concerns and engage in open, critical discussions on important issues. Please consider the long-term implications this legislation could have on individual freedoms and the essential role of free speech in achieving social justice.

At its core, the Bill would undermine the right to freedom of expression, a right guaranteed under Section 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Australia is a signatory. Article 19 of the ICCPR specifically safeguards the right to seek, receive, and impart information, acknowledging the importance of open debate in a democratic society.

History has shown that "truth" is not a static concept. It evolves with new evidence, perspectives, and debates. By attempting to define certain viewpoints or information as inherently false, the Bill risks entrenching political and ideological biases and stifling critical discussions on matters of public interest. This is not just an issue of policy, but of human dignity and democratic health. Free societies thrive when individuals are empowered to question prevailing narratives, including those held by governments, corporations, and media outlets.

Moreover, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has repeatedly stressed the importance of freedom of expression in maintaining a vibrant, pluralistic democracy. As stated in the Commission's 2020 submission on digital platforms, censorship laws must be narrowly tailored and transparent to avoid infringing upon the rights of individuals to express diverse viewpoints. The Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill, would give unprecedented powers to decide what constitutes truth, inviting significant overreach and the potential for abuse.

The Bill's broad powers to censor speech, particularly as it applies to "misinformation" or "disinformation," also raise significant concerns about the potential for government overreach, especially when it comes to exempting the government and media from the provisions of the Bill. When powerful institutions are not held accountable, they can operate with impunity, manipulating information to protect their interests. The proposed exemptions in this Bill would allow government and media organizations to decide what constitutes truth, while silencing voices that challenge official narratives.

Senator Payman, your advocacy for equality, social justice, and the empowerment of marginalised communities makes it clear that you understand the importance of safeguarding the rights of all Australians, particularly those who may already be vulnerable to discrimination and systemic injustice. The Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, poses a serious threat to these values. This Bill risks undermining the very freedoms that are crucial to creating an equitable society, where all individuals can express themselves freely and challenge unjust systems. I urge you to stand firm in defence of the democratic principles that protect the rights and voices of every Australian.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



EMAIL: Admin@wch-australia.org

WEBSITE: <https://wch-australia.org>

SUBSTACK: <https://substack.com/@wchaustralia>



15 November 2024

The Honourable Lidia Thorpe
Senator for Victoria
PO Box 1526,
186-188 Smith Street
Collingwood
Victoria 3055

E: senator.thorpe@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Thorpe,

The World Council for Health Australia (WCH Australia) write to express our deep concerns about the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, which is set to be debated in the Senate. This Bill represents a serious threat to fundamental freedoms, including the right to free speech, and is both legally and ethically unsupportable. We strongly urge you to oppose this Bill, as it undermines the democratic principles of this great nation that we know you are deeply committed to.

In opposing the Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, we urge you to consider the significant risks it poses to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, values that you have long championed. This Bill grants the government sweeping powers to determine what constitutes "misinformation," a concept that could easily be weaponized to silence dissenting voices, including those advocating for Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and environmental justice. As a staunch advocate for transparency and government accountability, you understand the dangers of allowing such power to lie in the hands of the state, especially when it comes to protecting the rights of marginalized communities. Additionally, the Bill's potential to limit free speech could undermine efforts to expose systemic injustices, including the ongoing struggles for Indigenous recognition and justice. In a democracy that you fiercely defend, it is essential that all Australians, especially Indigenous peoples, retain the right to freely express their concerns and challenge harmful narratives. The Bill's broad and vague definitions, coupled with the risk of government overreach, threatens the very freedoms you work to uphold.

At its core, the Bill would undermine the right to freedom of expression, a right guaranteed under Section 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Australia is a signatory. Article 19 of the ICCPR specifically safeguards the right to seek, receive, and impart information, acknowledging the importance of open debate in a democratic society.

History has shown that "truth" is not a static concept. It evolves with new evidence, perspectives, and debates. By attempting to define certain viewpoints or information as inherently false, the Bill risks entrenching political and ideological biases and stifling critical discussions on matters of public interest. This is not just an issue of policy, but of human dignity and democratic health. Free societies thrive when individuals are empowered to question prevailing narratives, including those held by governments, corporations, and media outlets.

Moreover, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has repeatedly stressed the importance of freedom of expression in maintaining a vibrant, pluralistic democracy. As stated in the Commission's 2020 submission on digital platforms, censorship laws must be narrowly tailored and transparent to avoid infringing upon the rights of individuals to express diverse viewpoints. The Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill, would give unprecedented powers to decide what constitutes truth, inviting significant overreach and the potential for abuse.

The Bill's broad powers to censor speech, particularly as it applies to "misinformation" or "disinformation," also raise significant concerns about the potential for government overreach, especially when it comes to exempting the government and media from the provisions of the Bill. When powerful institutions are not held accountable, they can operate with impunity, manipulating information to protect their interests. The proposed exemptions in this Bill would allow government and media organizations to decide what constitutes truth, while silencing voices that challenge official narratives.

In conclusion, Senator Thorpe, your unwavering commitment to protecting Indigenous rights, advancing social justice, and holding governments accountable is crucial in the fight against any form of authoritarian overreach. The Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024 poses a clear threat to the freedom of expression that you have long championed, particularly for those whose voices are already marginalized. As someone who has stood strong against systemic oppression, it is vital to ensure that this Bill does not further stifle the capacity of individuals and communities to challenge power, expose injustices, and speak truth to authority. The right to speak freely must not be compromised. I trust you will continue to fight for policies that uphold the rights and dignity of all Australians, ensuring that democracy remains a space where diverse voices can be heard and valued.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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WEBSITE: <https://wch-australia.org>

SUBSTACK: <https://substack.com/@wchaustralia>



15 November 2024

The Honourable David Van
Senator for Victoria
18 Park Road
Cheltenham
Victoria 3192

E: senator.van@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Van,

The World Council for Health Australia (WCH Australia) write to express our deep concerns about the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024, which is set to be debated in the Senate. This Bill represents a serious threat to fundamental freedoms, including the right to free speech, and is both legally and ethically unsupportable. We strongly urge you to oppose this Bill, as it undermines the democratic principles of this great nation that we know you are deeply committed to.

As you've rightly stated in your first speech to Parliament, "democracy works" because it provides all Australians a voice, and "good government means pragmatic decisions based on values." The proposed Bill, however, threatens to undermine this democratic foundation. It also contradicts your belief that "countries work better when people run their own lives," as the Bill gives the government unprecedented control over information, curbing individuals' ability to question or challenge prevailing narratives. The broad powers of censorship outlined in the Bill represent an extreme risk to the democratic principles of free speech and personal autonomy that you yourself and Australians at large hold dear.

At its core, the Bill would undermine the right to freedom of expression, a right guaranteed under Section 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Australia is a signatory. Article 19 of the ICCPR specifically safeguards the right to seek, receive, and impart information, acknowledging the importance of open debate in a democratic society.

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The Bill's broad powers to censor speech, particularly as it applies to "misinformation" or "disinformation," also raise significant concerns about the potential for government overreach, especially when it comes to exempting the government and media from the provisions of the Bill. When powerful institutions are not held accountable, they can operate with impunity, manipulating information to protect their interests. The proposed exemptions in this Bill would allow government and media organizations to decide what constitutes truth, while silencing voices that challenge official narratives.

In conclusion, Senator Van, we urge you to consider the grave implications of the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2024 through the lens of your strong support for individual freedoms, personal responsibility, and privacy. This Bill represents a significant overreach that could erode the very liberties you've long championed. As someone who values the right of Australians to express themselves without fear of interference, we ask you to reject this Bill and stand firm in protecting the freedoms that make our democracy strong. By rejecting this Bill, you will ensure that Australians retain their fundamental rights to freely engage in open debate, share diverse opinions, and take responsibility for their own lives without undue governmental control or surveillance.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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