

A joint letter from pro-secular organisations

Friday 5 July 2024

Dear Member of Parliament,

Our organisations represent the worldviews of pro-secular and non-religious people across Victoria. We are writing to urge you to support modernising the parliamentary procedures to replace exclusionary Christian worship with a practice that is secular and better reflective of the diversity of the Victorian community.

The current practice of observing Christian prayers in the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council makes many people feel unwelcome and excluded. This is evident in the [significant number of MPs](#) who are standing outside the chambers while prayers are recited. The practice is also at odds with the state's Multiculturalism Principles and Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act that emphasise equal opportunity for Victorians to participate in and contribute to public life without discrimination.

The Victorian Parliament has a historic opportunity to become the first state parliament to replace daily Christian prayers with a more welcoming practice that allows all elected representatives to participate fully and equally. The ACT Legislative Assembly provides a possible example to follow. In 1995, it amended its Standing Orders to remove the reading of prayers and instead allow members to "stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory".

The parliament is the state's most important democratic institution. It should reflect the community it serves and be welcoming for all. It should be a secular institution that does not privilege one religious worldview above all others.

The Victorian community is multicultural and diverse, with people from various religious backgrounds and, increasingly, people identifying as not religious. The state's religious demographics have fundamentally changed since prayers were first introduced into the parliament. [According to the ABS 2021 Census](#), 41% of Victorians identified as Christian and almost 40% had no religion.

On current trends, 'No Religion' will surpass Christianity at the 2026 Census and go well above 40%. Christians are expected to make up between 30-40% of the population. The 2021 Census also showed significant populations of non-Christian religious people (13%). It is no longer tenable to suggest Christian prayers represent the community – and, certainly, they are not, as Christian lobbyists claim, a unifying force.

Momentum for change on this issue has been building across Victoria and across Australia. At the local government level, a number of councils – including, more recently, Boroondara, South Gippsland, Mornington Peninsula, and City of Greater Bendigo – have removed prayers from meetings at the request of elected representatives and their communities. Other councils have noted the human rights implications of imposing religious worship on non-religious people and people of minority faiths.

More than 1050 days ago, the Victorian government made a commitment to the community that it would replace prayers with something more appropriate. We urge the Parliament to deliver on this commitment and provide an example for other parliaments across Australia to follow.

Yours sincerely,



**RATIONALIST
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