



# Gallagher, Pell row over plans to buy Calvary

By Ewa Kretowicz

Health Minister Katy Gallagher has hit out at the highest ranking Catholic clergyman in Australia, accusing him of interfering in the ACT Government's plans to buy Calvary Public Hospital.

The ACT Government has struck a deal to buy Calvary Hospital from the Little Company of Mary Health for \$77 million.

Under the deal, the Little Company of Mary would buy Canberra's hospice, Clare Holland House, for \$9 million.

But the proposal can only go ahead with the Vatican's approval and Ms Gallagher said she was concerned Catholic Archbishop of Sydney Cardinal George Pell's criticisms could scuttle the plan.

"I think it is very concerning if people from outside the ACT are running a campaign that is not what this issue is about and potentially jeopardising the future arrangements for Canberra's health system," Ms Gallagher said.

In a statement, Cardinal George Pell said the Government's motives were ideological and driven by anti-Christian elements.

"... Religious freedom is under pressure. The push for a charter of rights should be seen in a wider context that includes the attempt by the ACT Government to force the sale of Calvary Public Hospital in Canberra, which is run by the Little Company of Mary. If it succeeds in this, other public hospitals run by

religious organisations will be targeted next," Cardinal Pell wrote.

But Ms Gallagher said the sale was about owning an asset the ACT Government funded.

"He's simply not correct. Ideology and Christian values have never been part of the consideration by Government nor should they, I would argue," Ms Gallagher said.

"This is around the best way forward for our public health system and as a community it should be something our community decides, not outsiders with very strong views about the role of religion in public health care."

Cardinal Pell is the highest ranking Catholic clergyman in Australia and Ms Gallagher said the Cardinal's lobbying could influence the Church's decision.

"He is an influential person and ultimately the Vatican does decide on the future of Canberra's own public hospital ... I'm sure the lobbying that is being done in the Church at the moment will continue right up to when that final decision is made."

Opposition health spokesman Jeremy Hanson said Cardinal Pell's concerns highlighted the flawed nature of the proposal.

"He is entitled to make these comments and I'm sad that it's reached this point that he is accusing the ACT Government of driving an anti-Christian agenda," Mr Hanson said.

He said as part of the community

consultation process, Cardinal Pell's position needed to be considered.

Earlier this month, vicar-general of the Canberra archdiocese Monsignor John Woods said there was concern that the Church's mission to provide health care would be compromised by the sale.

"The Government's motivation in this instance hasn't been itemised," he said.

"We're led to believe that because Little Company of Mary and the ACT Government find a synergy in the proposed sale, then it's self-evidently correct.

"But within the wider populace and within Church circles, that is certainly being discussed and questioned."

Monsignor Woods' concerns were echoed at three community consultation sessions held by ACT Health.

Community submissions about the development must be delivered to ACT Health by November 12.



**DEBATE:** ACT minister Katy Gallagher has criticised the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell.