



Women and Equalities Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From the Chair

Mike Freer MP
Minister for Equalities and Minister for Exports
Government Equalities Office

By email

8 December 2021

Dear Mike,

Consultation on banning conversion therapy

Thank you for giving oral evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee on 30 November relating to the Government's proposals to ban conversion therapy. As you will be aware, prior to this session, we held a one-off oral evidence session on 24 November with two panels of witnesses.

After considering what we heard during both sessions, and correspondence with several counselling and psychotherapy bodies, we are writing to you to express some initial concerns we have about the draft proposals for a ban and to offer my Committee's support in the development of a bill.

The term 'therapy'

We have heard that the term 'therapy' is unhelpful, overly broad, misleading and confuses ethical, professional treatment with harmful practices. We agree. Whilst the term 'conversion therapy' may be widely used, it is not widely understood nor agreed upon. Legislation must not perpetuate this confusion.

When the Government brings forward a bill, the term 'practices' should be used and not 'therapy'. The Government should also include illustrative examples of conversion practices in the Explanatory Notes to the bill, and produce guidance which sets out the types of practices that the law would recognise as conversion practices.

Raising awareness

The Government has said it envisages support for victims to comprise of: a helpline and/or instant messaging service; and an online education resource that details the law on conversion practices. It is unclear how it will go about promoting these resources. The proposals for a ban heavily rely on victims being able to recognise that they have experienced conversion attempts, in order to report them.

When you gave evidence, you told us that this would likely be done through stakeholders at grassroots level and that we would not expect to see "advertising on the tube." The Government should be more ambitious about awareness raising both in terms of explaining to the public that conversion practices are illegal, and how victims can access support. It should do this through a broad public awareness campaign, once legislation has been passed. We would welcome adverts on the tube.



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From the Chair

Consenting to conversion therapy

The Government's own commissioned research has shown that most people who have undergone conversion attempts have done so voluntarily, even if it is encouraged by authority figures, such as parents. If a consent provision is to be included, there must be absolute clarity in the wording on what will count as a voluntary action. We have some further questions about how a consent model would operate:

- How will people demonstrate that the person subject to the conversion practice was given all relevant information, including that the practice would be harmful and would not work?
- Is it plausible that someone will ever volunteer for a conversion practice without the influence of others?
- Will the law in this case be allowing individuals to consent to a practice that can cause them serious harm?

Under 18s

In our session with you, we briefly touched upon how parents could, and should, discuss issues of gender identity and sexual orientation with their children. Time permitting, we would have liked to have also touched on the issue of other family members, particularly where they live in the same household, and schools.

The Government should a) produce statutory guidance for schools on how to support children exploring their gender, sexuality and relationship diversity, and b) make clear how the ban will allow teachers who are approached by children in schools to discuss their gender, sexuality and relationship diversity feel supported in doing so.

Next steps

The legislative process for banning conversion therapy provides a good opportunity for the Committee to support the GEO on this piece of work. Committees sometimes conduct pre-legislative scrutiny on draft bills. This allows the Government to test proposals once drafted, and for the Committee to recommend improvements. Our committee team would be happy to work with your officials to find a timeframe that would work with the Government plans for beginning the parliamentary process.

Please consider this letter as our initial response to the Government's consultation.

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee