

November 29, 2020

Dear Bill C-6 Justice Committee Members:

Thank you for your work on this committee and for listening to how Bill C-6 will affect me. I am imploring you to reword the current definition of "Conversion Therapy" in this bill! The term "Conversion Therapy" is currently so ill-defined and vaguely worded as to what conversion therapy is and what it isn't - it makes me very concerned that much harm will come in the future as individuals in various judicial systems are left to themselves to interpret it on their own. I am also afraid for my LGBTQ2S+ friends, that there will no longer be the availability of choice for them to ever change their mind regarding their sexuality, or to receive talk therapy or other support in the present or in the future - even if they ask for it!



This is deeply personal to me and I will share how this bill will affect me. My husband and I are pictured here with our dear friend Chris, whom we consider as family. He has a back story of identifying in his teens as a homosexual. He does not identify that way any longer, of his own choice. Chris identified as a woman in his early teen years, and at the age of 19 he began a huge journey of healing from the severe trauma in his life (both sexual assault and abuse from his father and physical abuse from his mother). As he began to deal with his rage against his parents and eventually forgive them, he noticed he began to feel more and more comfortable identifying as a man and eventually became attracted to the opposite sex. He did not seek out to change his sexual expression as he dealt with his childhood trauma, but over time, this is what seemed to happen. This was a journey that spanned a few years - at times he was helped by talking therapy, anger management, prayer, counselling and other methods. Chris no longer experiences PTSD, rage, an eating disorder or debilitating fear, and he is no longer suicidal. He is enjoying his life and relationships, and he says that he is the healthiest that he has ever been. He is now very comfortable in his own skin as a man and he would like to be affirmed as a man and no longer as a woman.

This is Chris's story and we have been honoured to walk alongside him these past 5 years in his journey of healing from horrendous child abuse that no one should ever have had to go through. This is Chris' story, and though it is not everyone's story, it very much needs to be considered as you look at passing this bill into law. To repeat for clarity, in the sharing of his life story, I am not implying that it is anything other than his individual journey, and I do not impose it or suggest it on others - I am simply highlighting to you that this bill affects many in its scope. As the bill is currently worded, it seems to indicate that my affirmations of him as

the gender that he was born with would now be criminal. This bill would leave me the only legal option of NOT affirming his manhood. I am sure that you could understand that with all of the confusion, rage and the sexual harm that has happened to him, I would never want to re-injure or confuse him by now suggesting that he is a woman because he had already made that choice in his teen years. This would be preposterous - he has been through enough pain and confusion already! Can you see how Bill C-6 can completely re-traumatize a person in Chris' situation? Could you consider re-wording the language of this bill so that people who decide on their own that they no longer identify as homosexual can receive any and all help that they may seek out and ask for? Can we eradicate wording that takes away an individual's choice, no matter what the age?

Chris now belongs to a group called "Changed" which has 100+ people in it that have a similar story of initially embracing homosexuality and then later finding out that it did not fulfill them as they thought. Many in this group (Changed, #oncegay) will often tell their personal story to any that ask them or seek them out. They do it in a non-judgemental and empathetic way, and do not coerce or shame others - they are deeply familiar with that treatment and despise it. But, now it seems as though this will also be illegal and criminal for them to share when asked. I wonder how it would feel for a person to be told that their actual life story is criminal to share?

I have heard it said that we don't need further clarity in the wording of the bill, and that there is already room in this law for "exploration" of someone's sexuality, but I want to assure you that CLARITY is of the utmost importance in the wording of this law. We vividly saw this need in my city of Calgary, in May of 2020, when we had the largest public discourse in our city's history spanning over 3 days with the proposal of a "Conversion Therapy" Ban. As we heard the 121 oral presentations to City Hall and saw the 1200+ written presentations, we also heard very clearly from city councillors in the deliberations afterwards that "talking therapy" was indeed "conversion therapy" and akin to hate and even to torture. We also clearly heard from our city officials that a proposed clause for an individual's freedom of choice of therapy was not to be included in this ban because it would make the ban "ineffective and would fall apart if choice were added to the wording of the ban". Yes, our city councillors stated that anyone who wanted to choose to walk away from identifying as LGBTQ2S+ would not be supported in that choice, and if any one wanted help that person as they did so would be guilty of an offense with a \$10,000 fine. Complete clarity is needed as to what "conversion therapy" is, or some people's interpretation of a word will cross boundaries into others rights and freedoms.

Please understand, I do not want to see young people coerced or shamed, ridiculed or horrendously treated - I have heard such stories and I am saddened to the bone when I hear them. It seems that in this bill we are attempting to protect those vulnerable ones who are being harmed in this way - so, let's clearly get this into the definition! And, let us also protect and believe those that have NOT found their experience identifying as LGBTQ2+ to bring them the fulfillment that they wanted. Let's not ignore them and tell them that they don't exist, and that their life story is "conversion therapy" to others. (This seems to be shaming in the worst regard!) Let's not make it illegal for anyone to affirm them in their birth gender if that is what they are asking for and wanting to talk about! Let's not deny them the freedom to choose the therapy of their choice. In fact to not allow "talking therapy" if a young person asks for or begs for it seems coercive on the other end!

In my situation, I will not go to jail for affirming Chris in the gender that he was born with, because Chris is an American - we met him while living in the USA for a few years. But, if Chris was a Canadian, I would actually be facing 2 - 5 years in jail, and if he happened to be living in Calgary, I would also receive a minimum \$10,000.00 fine. I am a normal Canadian, who lives a peaceful life, working and volunteering in my community. With this bill unchanged, I would be accused of hate, coercion, and "conversion therapy", all for befriending and helping a young guy who was in desperate need of safe adults in his life and the warmth of family - who happened to no longer want to identify as homosexual.

***In your deliberations this week - please remember Chris. Do not silence his existence and his life story, and many others like him. They need to be heard and considered, allowing all forms of people's journeys and freedoms to be enshrined in Canadian law.*** Please give concise wording that provides protection for those LGBTQ2S+ Canadians in Bill C-6 who no longer feel that the identification as a homosexual is the best road for them, and allow for them to choose the therapy of their choice. Let's remember that adolescence is tough enough as kids navigate the changes in their bodies and brains (current brain science says that brain development is not fully integrated until 23-25 years of age). We should be adding supports to all children and adolescents that desire it - not limiting or criminalizing requested supports.

Thank you for your leadership & your service to our country, and for considering this brief.

Sincerely,

Sherryl Anderton  
Calgary, Alberta