

Dear Minister Lametti,

I hope we would all agree that coercive and forced efforts to change sexual orientation have no place within our communities, and I know that that initiatives to ban conversion therapy are in an effort to protect Canadians from damaging effects that can be caused by such coercive tactics.

I have grave concern, however, about the scope of the proposed legislation. I am very concerned with the definition of conversion therapy proposed in Bill C-6, which goes beyond coercive efforts to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, and includes practices, treatments and services to "*repress or reduce... sexual behaviour.*"

Such a broad definition would infringe on religious expression, instruction and practice, even within loving, and supportive family and religious settings. An important aspect of religious identity is to learn and to share the teaching of sacred texts about how we should conduct ourselves in all areas of life, including human sexuality and sexual behaviour, and about the love and grace that help us through our difficult situations and how we will handle them in our lives.

Although the Justice Department summary says Bill C-6 would not criminalize "private conversations in which personal views on sexual orientation, sexual feelings or gender identity are expressed ..." (emphasis added), no such exception is evident in the legislation itself.

It is also unclear how the provisions in Bill C-6 may be applied to public religious instruction within religious organizations like churches through pastors and youth leaders who reach out in an effort to support young people, encouraging them to live life in a way that honours their faith. If only exploratory conversations are exempted, will instruction or public expression, such as a sermon series or youth bible study on biblical sexual ethics, be construed as "a practice, treatment or service?" And since the definition of conversion therapy includes reducing sexual behaviour, could programs offered in a church or ministry setting that consider sexual activity and promote abstinence for all teens, regardless of orientation, be captured by the legislation?

I am very concerned that this legislation could, by imposing criminal sanctions, penalize and silence public speech and religious instruction on matters of sexuality and gender.

I am also concerned with the fact that the terms "practice, treatment or service," while often used in a medical or therapeutic context, are not defined in Bill C-6 and can be interpreted and applied in various ways. As written, these terms could include voluntarily

sought out support groups for those who choose to live their lives in accordance with their religious beliefs.

In my opinion, an amended bill C-6 should:

- Ban coercive, degrading practices that are designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Ensure that no laws discriminate against Canadians by limiting what services they can receive based on their sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Allow parents to speak with their own children about sexuality and gender, and set house rules about sex and relationships;
- Allow free and open conversations about sexuality and sexual behaviour; and
- Not criminalize professional and religious counseling voluntarily requested and consented to by LGBTQ2 Canadians.

Canadians must continue to be free to order their sexual lives in accordance with their conscience, faith identity and personal convictions, and to voluntarily access support from their faith community, spiritual leaders, and others in doing so.

Religious institutions must also remain free to teach and instruct their members and adherents in faithful practices that are part of the religious tradition.

Sincerely,

Meg Cross,

Concerned Canadian