

Letter Regarding Bill C-06 Conversion Therapy Ban – Request to Fix the Definition

To: The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

From: D. Berg

Date: November 30, 2020

Thank-you for your dedication to Bill C-06. I am a supporter of LGBTQ rights. I applaud the efforts to protect LGBTQ individuals from abusive or coercive counselling practices. However, I am concerned that Bill C-06 as it was originally presented, will unnecessarily limit the lives of those it seeks to help. It will also further divide the LGBTQ community against traditional cultures and faith groups. I request your support of the Fix the Definition movement, in particular to allow any counselling or support that is provided with informed consent.

If Bill C-06 was only targeting abusive or coercive practices that were promising a complete change in sexual orientation, there would be no opposition, and I would fully support it. However, Bill C-06 instead has expanded the definition of conversion therapy so broadly that the original intent is lost.

I am man of >50 years of age. My life started with an exclusively homosexual orientation. Despite only positive experiences with homosexuality, and despite gay-affirmative friends, family, and church, I decided that being gay was too limiting. Instead, from my early 20's I decided to follow traditional and sexual gender ethics. I have enjoyed the support of many groups and counsellors over the years in my journey, which would be banned by the conversion therapy law. I have suffered no negative consequences. That support saved me from hopelessness and potentially from suicide. I am happily married to a woman and am enjoying the gift of our two children. I am in community with many other men and women with the same story.

I find the law proposed by Bill C-06 to be hurtful. I feel rejected and devalued. The bill completely disregards the stories of thousands of people who have had positive experiences with conversion therapy as defined by the law. The proposed law is essentially telling me and other Canadians that only specific beliefs regarding the place of homosexuality and transgenderism in our lives can be fully supported. I spent many years seeking God's direction regarding the role of my homosexual feelings in my life. But now the Canadian government is saying that my spiritual journey to find these answers cannot be validated. The government is trying to manage what should be a very personal and individual decision.

I believe the movement to pass a highly restrictive conversion therapy ban law is an attempt to eliminate all voices of judgement against the LGBTQ community. I too experienced that judgement and lived in fear of attack when I was younger. However, by taking a traditional path, I have found other means of freedom from judgements against homosexuality, and as a result have been able to enjoy so called conversion therapy without any negative emotional effects. I would gladly join arms with LGBTQ activists in promoting greater respect and understanding in communities who follow traditional sexual and gender ethics. However, using a conversion therapy ban to do this is not the right approach. The outcome of the ban will be a battle of words and legal nuances rather than real change.

The conversion therapy ban appears to be built on the following assumptions:

1. Anyone who experiences conversion therapy, in any form, is a victim. Nobody would freely choose this experience.
2. Anyone who freely gives consent to conversion therapy is practicing self-abuse.
3. Because, by some criteria, conversion therapy is considered ineffective, those who have had positive experiences are irrelevant.
4. The direction of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) needs to apply to all forms of support in any context.

None of the above assumptions are true for the following reasons:

1. There are inherent limitations to being LGBTQ. Therefore, many freely choose to push past those limits and find a way to live according to traditional sexual and gender ethics. The need to explore this path will always exist regardless of the law. To ensure nobody is a victim, people who offer support should be required to disclose the risks. This is how we handle many other products and services that come with some risk. This is how prescription medications are sold. Let people know the risks and let them decide; this would be empowering to LGBTQ individuals; the ban is disempowering.
2. Many LGBTQ people freely and knowingly choose to follow traditional sexual and gender ethics, taking advantage of any support available to do so. They follow this path with no negative consequences. So how is this self-abuse? I specifically wrote to the CPA about this question: 'Why do some people have negative experiences and others do not?' Karen Cohen of the CPA responded and acknowledged that the outcome may not always be negative. She said the CPA does not know the ratio of positive to negative experiences. There is a general absence of exploration regarding the reasons why some people have positive experiences and some negative. However, the CPA has concluded that because it is negative for some, it should not be allowed for anyone. Furthermore, any studies offered by LGBTQ activists focus only on people who have had negative experiences; they dismiss the possibility of positive experiences because it does not support their cause.
3. With any major internal change, most people understand that a complete change is probably not possible. This is the same for LGBTQ individuals who follow traditional gender and sexual ethics. The support they receive may help them to make a traditional life possible and fulfilling, but some degree of old feelings will probably still exist. This is still a positive result. So, holding up a standard of complete change in sexual orientation is a straw man argument.
4. Going to a CPA member for therapy is analogous to going to a standard medical doctor. Medical doctors offer the most commonly accepted forms of treatment. Standard medical treatments do not always work. People often seek other treatments. They know there are risks going outside of standard medical practices, but they believe that the risk is worth it. People should be free to seek therapy outside of CPA members when the CPA has decided it cannot help them. Informed and empowered consumers know the risks.

Please try to imagine there were two pills available, one to be LGBTQ and one to be straight / cisgender. Putting aside social discrimination issues, which pill would you choose? Which pill would you recommend to your children? Given the choice, very few people would choose to be LGBTQ. Although there are no such pills, all LGBTQ Canadians should be free to explore any path and all forms of support. Being LGBTQ is limiting and people should not be bound by those limitations. This law should only be focused on what is coercive and abusive, not what is possible.

In summary, I recommend that the conversion therapy ban include the following changes:

- Limit the definition of conversion therapy to any practices that promise a complete change in sexual orientation.
- Allow any form of counselling or support that is voluntarily undertaken with informed consent.
- Allow free and open conversations about sexuality, gender-identity and sexual behavior.

Thank-you for considering my comments.

Regards,

D. Berg