



December 4th, 2020

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights
on Bill C-6 “An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy)”
by the Associated Gospel Churches, Burlington, ON.**

As with many Canadians, we are opposed to and reject coercive and involuntary practices carried out that do not respect and cherish the dignity and worth of every person. We applaud our elected parliamentarians for their desire to protect the rights and freedoms of every Canadian citizen.

Our purpose in writing this submission is to voice our concern at the current framing of Bill C-6, which we believe has serious shortcomings and ambiguity that leaves legitimate and lawful ministries, individual pastors, Christian counselors, and churches open to potential criminal persecution. Whether intentional or not, the current definition encompasses helpful counseling and support of children, teens and adults struggling with gender dysphoria. It also, intentional, or not, encompasses spiritual counseling around sexual ethics and identity. Any legislative ban on conversion therapy must clarify that these practices are not conversion therapy.

We cannot see how Bill C-6, as it currently stands, will protect the religious freedom of Christian Pastors and Christian Counselors. The teachings of pastors on matters of human sexuality, as taught in Scripture, could be deemed illegal and criminal by the Bill.

The AGC is an association of approximately 150 congregations, 260 pastors, and representing a membership of nearly 23,000 people across Canada serving among eleven distinct language groups. As such we are bound in our belief and practice of the Christian Scriptures and by our denominational faith statements that state that sexual intimacy is reserved within the context of marriage between a man and a woman as God’s plan for human development, happiness and prospering within God’s purpose and design for his creation.

The imprecision of the current Bill C-6 gives us concern that there may be reason to anticipate criminal prosecution as we live out and practice our faith as it is currently written, and is a threat to our freedom of religion and conscience, our freedom of speech, and the rights of the family in society.

The professional help and counseling of children, teens and adults struggling with gender dysphoria, along with parental and pastoral counseling are not forms of conversion therapy. Likewise, religious instruction promoting healthy sexuality in line with Biblical teaching is not conversion therapy. Any ban on conversion therapy must not lump the helpful with the harmful.

Therefore, we humbly ask the government to take clear and defined steps to amend Bill C-6. It is imperative that the bill protect both those who are at risk, as well as the freedoms of religion and speech as guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The government can do this by narrowing the definition of "*conversion therapy*" so as to not capture normal and regular conversations between pastors and church members and normal and regular preaching and teaching of the Cristian Scriptures.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Associated Gospel Churches,

Rev. Bill Allan

President, Associated Gospel Churches