

Honourable Members of Parliament,

I am writing today on behalf of Wisdom2Action, a 2SLGBTQ+ owned and operated progressive consulting firm and social enterprise committed to facilitating change and strengthening communities. Since our inception in 2013, we have worked tirelessly to supporting the health and well-being of children and youth across Canada, with an emphasize on improving outcomes in marginalized communities. Over the past two years in particular, we have had the privilege of working with 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and communities across Canada to help grow our overall capacity to support, affirm and include 2SLGBTQ+ youth. We are writing to you today to express our heartfelt support for Bill C-6, and to encourage you to listen to the voices of 2SLGBTQ+ communities and youth who have been traumatized by the horrific, scientifically disproven and unethical practice of conversion therapy.

We have worked with 2SLGBTQ+ young people from coast to coast to coast. At every stage, we have heard stories of young people struggling to be themselves in the face of systemic homophobia and transphobia. We have heard stories of young people cast out of their homes, rejected by their families, and trying desperately to survive in a world that continues to be deeply hostile to their identities. Our young people are brilliant, resilient, brave and powerful. Our young people have survived in the face of insurmountable violence. Our young people are strong – but they shouldn't have to be. It brings tears to our eyes to write to you today, as we reflect on the immense pain that homophobia and transphobia has inflicted upon 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Conversion therapy is an extreme example of the homophobia and transphobia still present in our communities. It is, in its own way, the most extreme manifestation of the bigotry still all-too present in Canada. While many of those opposed to this legislation will claim they are speaking up in the name of children and youth, we hope you will see through the thin veneer of lies they utilize. We hope you will do justice to the survivors of conversion therapy who have fought for decades in Canada and around the world to end this horrific practice.

Opponents of C-6 will claim the legislation is a violation of free speech. For those of you who listened to the arguments articulated by opponents of C-16, the trans rights legislation passed in 2017, I hope you note the similarity in arguments. As trans communities and our allies fought for C-16, opponents claimed we were entering an unprecedented era of censorship. Now, four years later, I must ask: has that happened? Have Canadians been criminalized for failure to use the correct gender pronouns? No. Those opposed to this legislation have made an art out of deception. They use words they hope will appeal to your belief in fundamental Canadian values, rights and freedoms, while distorting the true meaning of those very concepts. They speak of free speech not in the hopes of protecting fundamental freedoms, but in the hopes of furthering their agendas – agendas which put 2SLGBTQ+ communities, children and youth at risk.

Furthermore, we hope you will note the similarities between the arguments presented by those opposed to this legislation, and the arguments that have historically been used to target gay, lesbian and bisexual Canadians. Following their failed efforts to stop marriage equality and trans rights in Canada, they have set their sights on C-6, and seek to use this opportunity to target trans children and youth in particular. Conversion therapy targeted at trans and gender diverse youth continues to enact trauma upon our communities. Trans and gender diverse youth are already overrepresented in homelessness populations, in poverty, in poor mental health outcomes and suicide. As you know, trans rights are indeed human rights. Children's rights must also be acknowledged as a fundamental right in a modern,

diverse and inclusive society. Ensuring the inclusion of gender identity within C-6 is a necessary step to protect the rights of trans and gender diverse children and youth. Conversion therapy is a traumatic practice that violates the tenants of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Subjecting children to unscientific therapies intended to repair or cure them of their sexual orientation or gender identity violates a child's right to protection against discrimination enshrined in Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which Canada is party. It also violates the CRC's guiding principle of Best Interest of the Child (Article 3) by failing to ensure that protection is provided and aligned with a child's well-being. Moreover, Article 19 requires Canada to take "legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation" which effectively describes the harm caused to children and youth subjected to conversion therapy.

Furthermore, under the Canadian Human Rights Act, children and young people in Canada are protected from discrimination based on their gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. The protections included within Bill C-6 codify the rights of trans, gender diverse and 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth to live free from harm and protected against discrimination.

At the end of the day, if Canada wishes to describe itself as a welcoming, diverse country, in which all individuals, regardless of gender, sexuality, race, class, sex or other identifiable category, are safe and protected by human rights legislation, we must take action to ban conversion therapy. Bill C-6 is an opportunity for Canada to continue to be a world leader on human rights and 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. Please, we beg of you, support C-6 and ban this horrific practice.

In solidarity,

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