

West Highland Baptist's Church's submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights regarding Bill C-6: An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy).

West Highland Baptist Church has a long history in the city of Hamilton. We are committed to serving and helping members of our church and the community in which we find ourselves. We also believe that every human being has intrinsic worth and dignity. We do not advocate for any form of coercion or coercive therapy but instead aim to proclaim the goodness and love of God for humanity in Jesus Christ.

Yet as the Lead Pastor of a church with over 1,000 congregants, I find myself concerned over the wording and implications of Bill C-6. West Highland Baptist Church follows the teachings found in our holy writings. They teach us that human goodness and flourishing involve sexual activity within covenantal marriage or faithful celibacy. For this reason, I am concerned that Bill C-6 will possibly criminalize spiritual and religious conversations about human flourishing.

In particular, Bill C-6 forbids “advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy.” What exactly does that mean? If we advertised a Sunday service on the goodness of marriage and sexual ethics from our holy writings, would we fall foul of this line? If not, we request that you amend the Bill C-6 to clarify this point, so that we can be assured that we can enjoy religious freedom and follow our holy writings.

We also ask that you clarify what are the “practices, treatment or services designed to change an individual’s sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender or to reduce non-heterosexual sexual attraction or sexual behaviour.” Do these lines refer to specific medical treatments? Or do they apply broadly even to religious or spiritual advice? What sort of advice would this law criminalize? How can we know where the line is? We ask for clarification on these matters.

As noted, West Highland Baptist Church values every human person. We do not believe in coercive or violent behaviour. Instead, we meet together weekly to worship our God, we follow our holy writings, and we aim to encourage and help anyone who comes to us for spiritual or religious instruction.

We see the welfare of the city and country in which we find ourselves. As a concerned church in Canada, we ask that you clarify the intent and specific line items in this Bill C-6 so that we can be assured that we can continue to enjoy religious freedom in Canada as well as our ministry to the whole community.

On behalf of the members and leaders of West Highland Baptist Church,

Rev. John Mahaffey
Lead Pastor