

Parliamentary Brief RE: Bill C-6 (conversion therapy)

Submitted by Dr. Christopher Jackman

December 6, 2020

Honourable Members of the House,

I am writing in support of the criminalization of conversion therapy. Conversion therapy is the most despicable kind of con, perpetrated on the vulnerable.

Conversion therapy is a con because [it does not accomplish what it purports to accomplish](#). According to the American Psychological Association (among others), there is no methodologically sound proof that conversion therapy is successful in achieving its goals.

Conversion therapy is the most despicable kind of con because [it causes indelible harm to those subjected to it](#). According to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, lesbian, gay and bisexual people who have been subjected to conversion therapy are almost twice as likely to attempt suicide as their peers. This compounds the [already increased risk of suicide](#) faced by 2SLGBTQ+ members of our society.

And last but not least, conversion therapy is perpetrated on the vulnerable. I understand this because I am its preferred clientele, both as a bisexual man and as father to a young trans boy.

I had always been a vocal ally of my friends and family in the queer community, but I was no less terrified when, in my early-30s, I came to accept my own attraction to men. I became convinced that I was lying to my wife by presenting an incomplete picture of myself, but was compelled to keep that secret for fear this knowledge would destroy our marriage. If I had been given the opportunity to amputate that part of me, I think I would have.

I was reminded of that feeling earlier this year, when our formerly happy-go-lucky 4-year-old “Susanna” was wracked with anxiety at the sight of Disney princesses, refused to wear clothes with colors or pictures, and was pulling their hair bald on one side. But this all vanished when they played, and they would play as a prince, or a knight, or a pirate, and they would ask us to call them a boy, day after day, until I asked back, “how would you feel if everybody at school said that you were a boy?” The wave of relief that broke across him was heartbreaking to me. I remember his joy in the weeks that followed as he interrupted play or dinner just to hug us and say “thank you for knowing I’m a boy.” And even then, even with the wholehearted support of family and teachers, his mother and I cried together because we could no longer use a name that we had learned to love more than life. We second-guessed ourselves constantly, and felt helpless at being unable to protect him from a wider world that might not understand.

I am lucky enough to have been raised through communities and institutions where conversion therapy would have been unthinkable, but I understand the vulnerability of its clients. Each of us are afraid of pain, whether it’s our own pain or the pain of those we love. Each of us would go to incredible lengths to save ourselves and our loved ones from suffering.

It is at this time, Honourable Members, that I would invite you to consider the depravity of conversion therapy and its practitioners. The best analogy I can think of is that of an old-time snake-oil peddler. They prey on the worst fears of the oppressed by pretending that oppression is not the problem, then actively harm their clients

under the guise of help. This committee will likely hear from practitioners who sincerely believe that their motives are altruistic - I have no comment on their personal motives - but the evidence-free system in which they practice is rotten through to the heartwood.

There is no problem with my glorious child who loves dragons, Lego, dogs, and the Nutcracker Ballet, who proudly bears the name of Kenneth after his late great-grandfather, and is being nurtured through an empirically-supported process of affirming care ([see Olsen et al., 2016](#)). Moreover, as a proudly out bi man who has learned to share his whole self with his partner and family, I can confidently say there is no problem with me either. Neither my son nor I should be subject to exploitation or injury for either sexual orientation or gender identity, which are an indelible, natural part of who we are. He and I are lucky to belong to supportive communities, but it saddens me to know that the only way we avoided further harm is through the dumb luck of birth and circumstance.

Conversion therapy is the most despicable kind of con, perpetrated on the vulnerable. Please protect Canadians on the basis of both gender identity and sexual orientation. Please criminalize conversion therapy for the safety of all Canadian families.

Sincerely,
Dr. Christopher Jackman

Works Cited

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