

Three easy steps to make a submission on the Conversion Practices Bill

NOTE: Submissions close Wednesday, 8th September

Step 1 ▶ **Take time to understand the issue.** Read the info below. Spend some time reading the bill itself [here](#),¹ and other info e.g. on [freetolive.nz](#).

Step 2 ▶ **Go to the online submission form [here](#)**². Your personal information will not be published if you use the online process, just your name. If you upload a Word doc or PDF you can remove personal info e.g. a letterhead. If there are personal or professional implications for your name being attached to your submission, you can limit identifying details in your submission. Or if you wish you can contact justice@parliament.govt.nz to request your submission is anonymous.

Step 3 ▶ **Write what you want to say** to the Justice Select Committee about this bill. Keep it to the point, and be respectful and constructive—if possible say what you would affirm, and challenge. If possible share your personal story and how the bill would affect you. Avoid using copy and paste submissions as these don't carry as much weight.

Submit

Press the submit button and you're all done!

Key Information

#1 If the bill passes in its current form, it would **make it illegal to** "change or suppress an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression" for anyone under 18 or lacking decision-making capability.

Penalty "A person convicted of this offence is liable to a term of **imprisonment** not exceeding **three years**."

#2 It would also **make it illegal** for anyone over 18, where this so-called "conversion practice" causes "serious harm", or where a person is "reckless as to whether it would cause serious harm".

Penalty "A person convicted of this offence would be liable to a term of **imprisonment** not exceeding **5 years**."

Here are three aspects that can be affirmed about the bill:

1. Its intention of protecting vulnerable people from harm and experiencing low mental and emotional health.
2. Its declared intent to "promote respectful and open discussions regarding sexuality and gender".
3. Its declared intent to "affirm the dignity of all people" and "uphold the human rights of all New Zealanders... to live free from discrimination and harm".

Here are three concerning aspects that can be challenged:

1. The bill **limits the freedoms of parents and whānau** to counsel their children.
2. The bill is **unclear around what would be legal and illegal**.
3. The bill **limits people's freedoms to seek prayer and counselling**, and the Church's freedoms to provide it.

Continue reading on page 2 to understand more about these three concerns....

Concern #1 The bill limits the freedoms of parents and whānau to counsel their children.

- ▶ Family and whānau have an intimate knowledge of their children; they love them and want what's best for them. This bill limits what they can and can't say to their children.
- ▶ As the bill currently stands, parents and whānau could be charged if they're perceived to be preventing their pre-teen children from taking puberty blockers, or for affirming their daughters as girls and their sons as boys, if their children have indicated otherwise.
- ▶ A key problem is, there are a diversity of views in the medical community around the benefits and harm associated with puberty blockers, hormone treatments and surgery. So, it's questionable that New Zealand is moving to introduce this law, believing it knows what's best for people when other countries such as the UK and Sweden have growing concerns about these treatments.

Concern #2 The bill is unclear around what would be legal and illegal

- ▶ When the Prime Minister and Minister of Justice have been asked about specific situations, they're unable to say what constitutes serious harm. Would parents telling their son he's a boy constitute serious harm? Would a friend telling a friend not to take hormone blockers constitute serious harm? It's ambiguous, and ambiguity makes for bad law.
- ▶ While the PM and Minister of Justice may truly believe the bar should be set high for criminal convictions, that's not ultimately up to them, and this law will be in place long after they've left office.

Concern #3 The bill limits people's freedoms to seek prayer and counselling, and the Church's freedoms to provide it.

- ▶ The message seems to be: you can change your sexuality or gender whenever you want, to whatever you want, as often as you want—you just can't get help to do so. That's doesn't make much sense.
- ▶ If someone wants prayer or counselling to change their sexual orientation, gender, or anything else going on in their life, they should be allowed to seek, and receive it.
- ▶ There are good reasons why there is separation of Church and State; there are good reasons why the Church doesn't get to restrict what laws the government passes, and why the State doesn't get to restrict what the Church can and cannot pray for.

To summarise these three points, this bill would transfer freedoms away from families, individuals, and the Church, to the State —and there are legitimate reasons to be concerned about that.

Here is a possible additional clause to the bill:

To give effect to the second purpose of the Act as stated in 3(b), and to mitigate most of the inappropriate likely consequences of this Bill, we very strongly recommend a further clause be inserted into Section 5 (2), that...

[“in this Act, conversion practice does not include—]

(g) respectful and open discussions regarding sexuality and gender, and advice, guidance, prayer, or support given to anyone by anyone else including parents, family members, friends, counsellors, religious leaders, or health professionals, when such advice or support is requested and is respectful and non-coercive”.

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