



THE CRIMINALIZATION OF **CONVERSION THERAPY:** TALKING POINTS AND ACTION ITEMS

On October 1, 2020, the federal government introduced legislation to criminalize “conversion therapy” in Canada with Bill C-6.

Proposed bans on conversion therapy will reduce the availability of psychological help for children, teens, and adults; negatively impact spiritual counselling, teaching, and mentoring on questions of identity and sexual ethics; and chill religious freedom.

The previous legislative proposal defined “conversion therapy” as “a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.” It appears that “conversion therapy” to change one’s sexual orientation from heterosexual to non-heterosexual is exempt.

This definition is far too broad and does more harm than good. Intentionally or not, this definition captures helpful counselling and psychological support for children, teens and adults struggling with gender dysphoria. It also captures spiritual counselling around sexual ethics and identity. Any proposal to ban conversion

therapy must clarify that these practices are not conversion therapy.

Without this clarification in law, conversion therapy bans like Bill C-6 make it a criminal offence for parents to bring their child to counselling to address gender dysphoria. It would be a criminal offence to help their child be comfortable in their own skin. The penalty (for both the counsellor and the parent) is up to 5 years in jail.

Some politicians claim that parents and pastors may still have conversations with children about sexuality. But these conversations must be, according to the Minister of Justice David Lametti, “open-ended and exploratory.” In other words, when it comes to determining “who you are,” a parent or a pastor cannot give direction or concrete answers to a child.

Here are some talking points from ARPA Canada to help you speak about this issue:

- > We affirm the inherent dignity and worth of each individual. Every person is a unique creation made in the image of God. Because of this belief, we love all individuals and want them protected in law.
- > Children are our number one concern. We want to ensure that all children, including those struggling with gender

dysphoria or dealing with childhood trauma, get all the help they deserve without any interference from the civil government.

- > The Christian community supports the ban on conversion therapy where conversion therapy is properly and precisely defined. The criminal law must only capture truly coercive and dangerous types of conversion therapy.
- > The professional help of children, teens, or adults who are struggling with gender dysphoria and parental and pastoral counselling 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.
- > Those who promote overly broad conversion therapy bans encourage children to unquestioningly embrace their self-perceived gender identities or sexual orientations, despite the fact that these identities are mutable and likely to change through adolescence.



So, what can **YOU** do?

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Pray:** Almighty God, please preserve our freedom to share the truth around gender and sexuality with fellow Canadians. Preserve our freedom so that we can offer help and answers to those struggling with questions about their identity and sense of belonging. And inspire us as individuals and churches to use this freedom and not squander it.
- 2. Pray Again:** Glorious Father, please protect vulnerable children from abuse and exploitation, particularly from those pushing radical “gender reassignment” for the young. Frustrate the work of the devil and bring the evil of bodily mutilation to a halt. Protect children from confusing and unsettling ideas and may they find belonging in healthy families and communities, and peace and acceptance with the beautiful body that you have created for them.
- 3. Inform yourself:** Read up on conversion therapy (what it is and isn’t). A helpful resource is ARPA Canada’s Fall 2019 policy report on conversion therapy, freely available online at ARPACanada.ca/publications.
- 4. Write your MP:** Take fifteen minutes to write an EasyMail to your MP. Conversion therapy is not a topic that most MPs know a lot about, so your communication with them on this topic can be especially effective. This is just as important if your MP is a Liberal or New Democrat. Ask your MP to clarify that pastoral counselling, parental conversations, and professional help to address gender dysphoria are not forms of conversion therapy.
- 5. Write a Letter to the Editor:** Take fifteen minutes to write an EasyLetter to your local newspaper editor. Letters to the editor can reach a large number of people in your local community and even across Canada. Christians need to provide an alternative narrative to the media’s constant condemnation of spiritual counselling.

For assistance in how to complete these action items please contact ARPA’s Federal Manager, Colin Postma
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