



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cabinet Office - Government Equalities Office
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Our reference: BS12848

4 February 2022

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Response to the consultation on banning conversion therapy

I welcome the Government's commitment to introduce a legislative ban on the practice of so-called conversion therapy. Being lesbian, gay or bisexual is not an illness to be treated or cured and I agree that offering what purports to be medically sanctioned treatments to change or reverse sexuality or gender identity should be banned. While there are already clear professional codes of practice and standards to govern how patients are treated, where issues and concerns are raised it is right to strengthen this with legislation.

As a mental health doctor previously working as a consultant on a woman's inpatient ward and later for a HIV psychiatry service, I have treated many people from the LGBT community who have struggled with issues relating to their sexuality or gender identity. There can be many reasons patients present with issues relating to gender or sexuality, and we need to ensure that there are services and options to support people in this situation. Distress due to one's sexuality or gender identity can result from cultural or religious factors, from abuse, or even be a sign of underlying treatable mental illness, and it is critical that clinicians can explore this with total clinical freedom and care for their patients accordingly. Therefore while 'conversion therapy' as described above should absolutely be banned, it is important that treatment and care for issues arising or related to sexuality and gender is not – and this is the position laid out in the recent consensus statement:

www.psychotherapy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ukcp-conversion-therapy.pdf

I believe it is vital to people's wellbeing that they are able to explore issues around their sexuality and gender identity as they wish, such as through discussions with faith groups, family and community leaders. If a person wishes to discuss issues around their sexual orientation or gender identity they should of course be free to do so even if the purpose of this discussion is to change their views either explicitly or implicitly, but it is essential that this is not coerced or indeed coercive. A ban on what purports to be 'medical conversion therapy' should not preclude this and it must be clearly defined to ensure it does not limit access to support and services.

There is a danger that any legislation may have a 'chilling effect' on clinicians working in this field due to fear of vexatious claims, leading to poorer care and outcomes for patients. Clear guidance and/or primary legislation will need to be provided in order to give clinicians confidence. Where possible I believe that when practitioners are professionally regulated (e.g. by the General Medical Council) following a complaint or concern being raised, initial investigation should be undertaken by these regulators or Hospital Trusts as part of usual complaints procedure prior to any referral to the police.

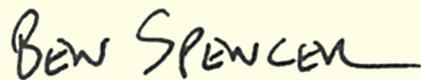
Concerns have also been raised over the potential impact on family life, for example where parents may wish to discuss and advise their children on options available to them and the fact that this is not explicitly referenced in the consultation. It is a fundamental role of a

parent to provide advice and guidance and the law should not restrict or limit this. I hope the omission of this issue from the consultation is due to the fact this is not the intent of future legislation on this matter. However I share the views of my constituents who have written to me that this also must be clarified and specifically referenced when legislation is brought forward.

It is clear that, while a ban on purported medical conversion therapy is needed, this debate touches on a range of wider issues, including the need to protect the rights of individuals and access to legitimate support services and advice. I am grateful the Government has taken the time to gather all views and information ahead of legislation being brought forward.

This consultation is vital to ensure this legislation delivers the balance between protection for those at risk of conversion therapy, and retention and protection of services for those who are genuinely in distress or seeking help and advice on sexuality or gender identity issues. This is a complicated area to legislate, with the potential for far reaching and unintended consequences and I believe it is important that in addition to this consultation any future legislation undergoes pre-legislative scrutiny.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Spencer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Ben Spencer MP
Runnymede and Weybridge