THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE

Draft Conversion Practices Bill: Joint Committee Call for Evidence

Guide to responding

The draft Bill creates a far-reaching criminal offence with flawed safeguards. It does not require any proof that the accused intended to abuse or harm. The fact that their actions were objectively reasonable is no defence. And Conversion Practices Protection Orders, which could criminalise failure to affirm someone's identity, are even easier to obtain from a court. All this threatens ordinary parenting and the ordinary work of churches, and is incompatible with fundamental rights.

The draft Bill is available here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-conversion-practices-bill/conversion-practices-draft-bill

The call for evidence document is available here:
https://committees.parliament.uk/submission/4010/#/evidence/4010/call-for-evidence

Our briefing with a general outline of the draft Bill's proposals is available here:
https://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Draft-Conversion-Practices-Bill-2026.pdf

REMEMBER

- The deadline for responding is **5pm on Monday 16 November**.
- Be clear and concise. If your submission is over 3,000 words, you should include a brief summary.
- Use numbered paragraphs.
- Your evidence must be uploaded as a Word, ODT or RTF file (**not** a PDF) no larger than 25MB. Do not include logos, decorative graphics or repeated headers and footers.
- **You may want to include personal or professional experience, but remember your submission will be published on the Committee website. (You can ask for your personal details to be redacted when you upload your document.)**

THE POLITICS

You are not writing to the Government. You are writing to twelve MPs and Peers from across the political spectrum. They have been asked to scrutinise a Bill and you are helping them. They need points they can include in a report about the Bill. The argument most likely to get through to them is that the proposals are unworkable.

Do focus on the call for evidence questions, but you don't need to answer every one. We have selected key questions and suggested some points to choose from when writing your answers. ***BUT PLEASE USE YOUR OWN WORDS.***

If you are a parent, a church leader, a teacher, a social worker, or a healthcare professional, explain to the Committee how a conversion practices ban could damage your ability to talk with those in your care.

DRAFTING YOUR RESPONSE: SELECTED QUESTIONS FROM THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE

"2. To what extent does the draft Bill address conduct and harms that are not currently dealt with effectively under existing legislation?"

- The Bill is unnecessary because existing law already rightly protects everybody, including people identifying as gay and trans, from assault, sexual violence, harassment and other forms of abuse. The Government has not given specific examples of behaviour that deserves to be criminalised which cannot already be prosecuted under the current law. There are no new benefits to the Bill but plenty of risks.
- The Bill would cut across freely requested prayer and pastoral conversations within churches, and ordinary disagreements within families. It could make them criminal, with devastating consequences for those convicted.
- Abusive speech can already be prosecuted. We do not need a new speech crime, especially in such a controversial area.
- Lawyers say there is no gap in the law. The Bill is not a proportionate response to a real problem. It is a disproportionate interference with human rights.
- Better enforcement of existing law, and better support for victims, would be more effective than a new badly drafted law.

- The low, vague thresholds in the Bill will themselves cause harm, in the form of malicious accusations by activists, and fearful self-censorship by innocent parents and pastors.

"5. Are the key concepts in the draft Bill defined appropriately, and is their scope sufficiently clear?"

- Clause 1 creates a very wide category of "conversion practice" before adding thresholds to determine whether it is criminal. This approach captures ordinary, innocent conversations and labels them negatively as conversion practices. This is not how criminal law normally works.
- References in Clause 1 to psychological or emotional pressure as forms of 'abuse' will be interpreted widely, especially in the current toxic climate. Reasoning with someone, expressing concern or urging them to reconsider a decision should not be treated as abusive 'pressure' merely because the message is unwelcome. Persuasion is not abuse.
- The Bill enshrines the highly disputed concept of 'transgender identity' and says it includes identifying as neither male nor female. The Government should be asked to explain how many 'gender identities' this covers.
- The 'harm' threshold of the Bill is much too uncertain for policing sensitive conversations about sexual orientation and gender. Discussions are often difficult, and a person identifying as gay or trans will often already feel "alarm or distress" before the conversation even begins.
- The Bill risks capturing harmless guidance, such as a parent advising a child not to engage in sexual activity or a Christian seeking advice about sexual ethics.
- Under Clause 1, conduct can be labelled a conversion practice without being abusive or criminal. Legitimate conversations could acquire a damaging label, with consequences for people's employment, reputation or involvement in church life.
- The Bill borrows key concepts from other laws such as domestic abuse but does not keep important safeguards found in those other laws, such as a defence where the conduct is deemed reasonable. People whose behaviour is reasonable in all the circumstances should not be liable to a criminal conviction.
- A person can commit the offence even though they did not intend or even foresee that their behaviour might be considered abusive or harmful. Normally the criminal law requires proof of a bad intention.
- Under Clause 1, the only intention that a prosecutor would have to prove is an intention to change someone's sexual orientation or transgender identity, or to change what they believe about it. Simply encouraging someone to believe in Christian sexual ethics, or to believe that men can't become women, should not be covered by the Bill.

"10. How adequate are the conversion practice protection orders? Are additional measures, safeguards or other changes required?"

- A court can make a protection order against any person, regardless of whether they are being prosecuted for the main offence. The judge does not have to be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt, merely on the balance of probabilities.
- The order can impose whatever conditions the judge considers appropriate, including prohibiting perfectly lawful conduct.
- It appears that an order could be obtained even against the will of the person being 'protected'. It could prevent them attending church or taking part in a gender-critical discussion group.
- Anyone can ask a court for permission to apply for an order. There is nothing to prevent activist groups trying to use the system to punish their political opponents.
- The Committee should ask the Government whether an order could be used to compel someone to use 'preferred pronouns'.

"12. To what extent does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse, and other rights around privacy and family life, and freedom of expression?"

- The main offence does not require abuse or harm to be intended or even foreseen by the accused. Being sure their behaviour was harmless will not help them. This risks criminalising someone acting with the best of intentions, if the person making the accusation claims to have been distressed.
- There is no defence of reasonableness in the Bill. This is a departure from the normal approach to non-violent crimes, like controlling or coercive behaviour. But it is vital to protect harmless activity that looks at first like criminal conduct but turns out to be perfectly reasonable.
- The Bill attempts to create an exemption for healthcare. But the very fact that an exemption is deemed necessary is an admission that the thresholds of the offence could capture ordinary, legitimate medical practice.
- The exemption for conversations in healthcare settings implies that identical conversations in other settings are outlawed. A doctor talking to a patient and his wife could be exempt while the wife, in the same room having the same conversation, is guilty of an offence.
- The Bill has no religion or belief safeguards, leaving ordinary Christians, gender-critical feminists, loving parents and sensible teachers at risk of prosecution over their conversations.
- It is patronising to suggest that adults cannot consent to taking part in challenging conversations about their own sexual orientation or gender.
- Leading lawyers have repeatedly warned that a bill on conversion practices risks putting the UK in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Detransitioners, who regret changing gender, must be free to tell their own stories to others without the threat of criminalisation at the hands of activists accusing them of trying to 'change' their gender identity.
- Even where no conviction follows, an investigation can cause distress, expense and reputational damage. Fear of allegations could make people withdraw from worthwhile conversations or stop offering help.

- People should be able to debate sexual ethics, biological sex and gender identity. Disagreeing with a viewpoint should not put you at risk of prosecution.
- Offence, disappointment or discomfort should not be confused with the serious consequences normally required for criminal liability.
- Reasonable discussion and advice are an everyday part of family life, not matters for the criminal law.
- If it wants to interfere with the right to family life, the Government must demonstrate why the proposals are necessary and proportionate. It has failed to do so.
- The Bill puts the coercive power of the State on one side of the culture war over identity issues.
- Professionals like healthcare workers, teachers and social workers will be anxious to avoid misconduct allegations based on being involved in a conversation the law deems 'conversion therapy' under Clause 1 even if it does not cross the remaining thresholds of the offence.
- Clause 5 creates the prospect of members of a women's discussion group, or a prayer group, being prosecuted for not preventing one of their friends 'saying the wrong thing' in the presence of someone who identifies as LGBTQ.

"15. How far does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse and those who hold parental rights and responsibilities regarding a child's upbringing?"

- Parents are responsible for teaching, advising, setting boundaries and protecting their children. Those responsibilities do not disappear when a child raises questions about sexual ethics or gender.
- A parent might question a proposed transition, restrict access to pornography or express concerns about potentially harmful interventions. Such actions alone should not be treated as abuse.
- The Government must respect the freedom of parents to bring up their children in accordance with their beliefs. This is protected under human rights law. The Supreme Court has emphasised the importance of families being able to bring up their children in their own way.
- Including economic, emotional and psychological pressure as potential indicators of abuse is unworkable and dangerous. All parents use pressure in conversations with their children. Parenting would be impossible without it.
- Parents must not be at risk of prosecution simply for discouraging their child from taking damaging puberty blockers.
- This threshold risks turning minor family disagreements over values or rules into matters for the police.
- There will inevitably be a risk that parents will be prosecuted merely for trying to guide their children to the path they believe is best for them.
- The law should not criminalise parents for fulfilling their duty to protect their children. Blocking access to dangerous trans videos on YouTube should not make you a criminal.
- The Bill will create a chilling effect. Parents who fear investigation may feel unable to explore the reasons for their child's feelings. Children could lose support from those who know them best and care for them the most.
- The draft Bill makes no distinction between children and adults. But the relationship between a parent and a child is not like an adult relationship. Parents will insist that their children comply with all sorts of minor rules that they would never attempt to impose on another adult.

"16. How far does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse, and other rights around freedom of religion and belief, conscience, and expression?"

- The Government must explain why it has chosen the term "conversion" to describe what it wants to outlaw. Conversion is a central aspect of the Christian faith. The right to change religion – to convert – is protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- The Committee must be wary of attempts to target religious people by characterising ordinary, harmless religious practices as 'conversion practices'.
- Clause 1 makes the intention to change what someone believes to be their sexual orientation or gender identity part of the definition. This puts expressions of belief and opinion, which are protected by Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention, within the scope of the offence.
- If the legislation is taken forward, the offence must be much more clearly targeted. It has to ensure that a church which teaches the Christian sexual ethic, and takes steps such as withdrawing membership from people who reject it, cannot be construed as engaging in conversion practices.
- Consent is not a defence. Some church leaders will avoid responding to requests that could later be used against them. This will prevent innocent people from getting the ordinary spiritual support they want. The Bill must make clear that praying with other people, at their request and with their consent, can never be criminalised.
- The proposals would lead to police action against the innocent, ordinary work of churches. This is what some activists campaigning for the Bill want. They are hostile to mainstream, traditional beliefs about biological sex and sexual ethics. The Bill must not create a weapon for them to use against churches.
- It is essential that an adult who wants support from their church to live a celibate life should be free to receive that support without exposing the church to prosecution when others misconstrue that support as a conversion practice.
- Some activists object to biblical teaching about sexual ethics. They are free to do that. But it is not the job of the State to dictate Church doctrine. Repentance from sin of every kind, including sexual sin, is a basic part of the Christian life for every believer. A conversion practices law must not criminalise Christian beliefs.
- The offence will have a chilling effect on churches providing people who identify as LGBTQ with everyday spiritual support, for fear that they may later make accusations of conversion practices against the church.

- Express provision must be made in the Bill to reassure Christians that simply explaining biblical teaching to someone who experiences same-sex attraction or identifies as trans will not constitute an abusive conversion practice.
- Christian discipleship and fellowship includes teaching, prayer, repentance and helping one another live according to biblical convictions. Upholding religious freedom means protecting the practice and sharing of beliefs, including in individual conversations.

SUBMITTING YOUR RESPONSE

Once you've completed your document, go to the call for evidence page:
https://committees.parliament.uk/submission/4010/#/evidence/4010/call-for-evidence

At the bottom of the page, select **'Start submission'**.

At the bottom of each of the next two pages, select **'Continue'**.

You should reach a page headed 'Who are you submitting evidence for?' **'Individual'** will be appropriate for most people, but please select **'Organisation'** if you are responding on behalf of your church. Select **'Continue'** at the bottom of the page.

Enter your details. You must give a last name and email address. Organisations must provide the name of the organisation and the role of the person responding. Select **'Continue'**.

This page is where you upload your response document. Afterwards, you should see the name of your document and the message "Your file is attached". Select **'Continue'** at the bottom of the page.

On the next page, you are able to request that your evidence is anonymous or confidential if you wish, but please note that this is not guaranteed.

You must tick the box confirming that you take full responsibility for your submission and acknowledge how it will be handled. You can then select **'Confirm and submit evidence'**.