



THE CHRISTIAN
INSTITUTE
NORTHERN IRELAND

Conversion therapy update

June 2021



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The media has created a sense of crisis around conversion therapy and a ban is very likely. The Christian Institute supports protecting people from dangerous medical practices. But activists want prayer, pastoral conversations, preaching and even parenting to be caught. This is a fast-moving issue. This leaflet covers key developments since our previous briefing in November 2020.



Read: Banning conversion therapy or banning the gospel?

christian.org.uk/con-therapy

Prayer and parenting to be caught by the ban

Activists want a ban to cover trans issues and some NI Executive ministers have indicated they support this.¹ But it could mean that a parent who urges their child not to seek damaging puberty blockers would be breaking the law. Meanwhile, a founder of the 'Ban Conversion Therapy' campaign says "'Spiritual guidance' is really just religious speak for conversion therapy"² and "the pernicious power of prayer must be dealt with".³ But a ban on spiritual guidance and prayer would be tyrannical and unworkable. Police and the courts would have to decide which kinds of prayer are criminal and which are not.



“While some violent practices which may be classed as conversion therapy, such as ‘corrective rape’, are already covered by existing criminal offences, many religious practices, such as ‘group prayer’, are not.”⁴

BBC News, 16 December 2020

CI WARNS NI EXECUTIVE OF LEGAL ACTION

Lawyers representing The Christian Institute have written to the Executive pledging to judicially review a conversion therapy ban if it outlaws prayer. The CI's QC, human rights expert Jason Coppel, says definitions of conversion therapy proposed by activists would criminalise the legitimate expression of religious beliefs.⁵ Another QC, Philip Havers, also warned recently that a loosely phrased conversion therapy law would be “an unlawful interference” with human rights.⁶

ACTIVISTS CONDEMN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS

Despite strong backing from lawyers for the human rights of Christians, activists are dismissive of such concerns.

Amnesty International said: “proponents of so-called conversion therapy have tried to hide their anti-LGBT+ views by representing these practices as being about... religious liberty, often carried out in the context of pastoral care or prayer ministry.” “MLAs should not be distracted by spurious arguments”.⁷

On 20 April, MLAs passed a non-binding motion calling for a ban on conversion therapy. Alliance MLA Andrew

Muir told the Assembly: “The idea that a ban on conversion therapy can be an attack on religious freedom is building a straw man.”⁸

Meanwhile, activists are increasingly up front about targeting ordinary church work. Dr Garry Adair Gilliland told the BBC his experience of ‘conversion therapy’ was: “prayer, Bible studies and teaching around opposition to what they phrased as same-sex attraction. It was really to reinforce that this was something that wasn’t Biblical...”⁹



INCLUDING TRANS IS RISK TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey, who has taken charge of introducing a ban, believes it should cover both sexual orientation and gender identity.¹⁰

This could make it unlawful for a parent to try to dissuade their troubled son or daughter from taking irreversible ‘sex change’ drugs. Urging them to live as their biological sex could be criminalised. Young people will be put at risk of life-changing medical transition they may later regret.

Parents who complain against a school for confusing their child by teaching gender ideology could also fall foul of this law.

AUSTRALIAN STATE OUTLAWS BIBLICAL PRAYER

Pastoral advice and prayer that uphold biblical teaching on sexual ethics have been criminalised in the Australian state of Victoria. Any practice that seeks to change or suppress “sexual orientation or gender identity” is outlawed – including “prayer based practice”. Offenders face up to ten years in prison and a maximum fine of over £100,000.

Victoria’s Attorney General said church ministers will be re-educated by the state to prevent them breaking the law.¹¹ British Conservative MP Alicia Kearns says: “The

model that’s been passed in Victoria is a good one”.¹²



References at the.ci/con-therapy-ni-ref



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