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Defending free speech

Free speech, so vital for democracy, is under threat.

Since coming to power, the Government has ditched a law to help universities protect and promote free speech, and started making plans for tougher policing of 'non-crime hate incidents'. Censorship of online content deemed 'legal but harmful' is being considered once again, having been dropped in 2022 following a lengthy CI campaign. And of course, the proposals for a new ban on so-called conversion therapy puts those who faithfully

preach the Gospel at risk of being turned into criminals.

Such measures will concern anyone who cares about free speech. The Institute has been quick to respond: advocating for the precious religious liberty and freedom of expression we enjoy – hard-won down the years by believers – to be maintained.

We will continue to do all we can to defend the freedom to speak the truth about sin, salvation, the nature of marriage, the reality of biological sex, the sanctity of life and more.

'Conversion therapy' law threatens innocent pastors and parents

The Christian Institute has warned that the Prime Minister's pledge to ban so-called conversion therapy threatens gospel freedom.

The Labour Government is set to bring forward a draft Bill on banning 'conversion practices'. LGBT activists are pushing for it to include prayer, preaching and pastoral conversations that affirm biblical sexual ethics and defend the reality of biological sex. A draft Bill must undergo pre-legislative scrutiny before being debated in Parliament. This is expected

to include public consultation.

Institute Deputy Director Simon Calvert stated: "The Christian Institute has obtained legal advice from leading King's Counsel on every attempt to legislate for conversion therapy in the UK and every time those KCs have advised that there are multiple risks to the human rights of innocent parents, pastors and professionals."

He concluded: "We very much doubt that Labour can succeed where everyone else has failed."

In response to the Government's



Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer

announcement, church leaders said that religious illiteracy on gender and sexual ethics was fuelling "unwarranted hostility" toward Christians in discussions over 'conversion therapy'.

In a letter to Sir Keir Starmer, ministers

from a range of denominations offered to help the new Government "better understand Christians and their beliefs".

The Christian Institute has threatened legal action if proposals for a ban restrict religious liberty.

Brits who back assisted suicide in theory say it's unsafe in practice

More than four in ten people who back assisted suicide have serious doubts about its safety, a recent poll has revealed.

According to a survey of 2,001 British adults by Whitestone Insight, 42 per cent of those in favour of changing the law believe it is too complicated to introduce safely. Half agreed that removing end-of-life protections would fundamentally change the doctor-patient relationship.

Research group Living & Dying Well, which commissioned the poll, said it "pushes back against the narrative frequently promoted by those who say the public support a change in the law". It added that the responses highlight "the serious concerns" of ordinary people, which must be considered by Parliamentarians.



The Prime Minister has promised to allow parliamentary time for a Private Member's Bill to legalise assisted suicide. He has stated that he is "personally in favour of changing the law" and will allow Labour MPs a free vote on the issue.

The House of Lords is expected to debate Lord

Falconer's Private Member's Bill in November. The Bill aims to allow assisted suicide for those deemed terminally ill with less than six months to live.

Legislation to permit assisted suicide in the Isle of Man is proceeding after a last-ditch attempt to hold a referendum on the issue was defeated by a single vote.

CI urges Prime Minister not to bow to demands for free speech restrictions

The Christian Institute has urged the Prime Minister not to respond to this summer's public disorder by imposing draconian restrictions on free speech.

While it said the Government must examine the root causes and prosecute the perpetrators of the "shocking scenes of violence", the CI also

warned that ministers should not be drawn into a knee-jerk reaction.

The Prime Minister has said he does not wish to pass new legislation "every time there is a challenge", but he is under pressure to take action.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan told the Government to re-examine the Online Safety Act, claiming it was "not fit for purpose". However,

online threats are already illegal and one woman was recently convicted for sending online messages calling for a mosque to be blown up.

The Institute's Deputy Director Simon Calvert said the Government must not reintroduce restrictions on content deemed 'legal but harmful' to adults, saying it could lead to "damaging limitations on legitimate debate".



CofE votes for same-sex blessing services

Proposals to allow specific services for same-sex blessings have been backed by the Church of England.

In July, the Church's General Synod authorised the use of specific prayers in standalone services that 'celebrate and affirm' same-sex relationships. The Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity all voted in favour.

A trial of the services is expected to begin next year. If it is deemed a success, churches will be allowed to devote whole services to blessing couples who have been through a same-sex civil ceremony.

General Synod member Revd Dr Ian Paul said the bishops who had driven it through "do not believe the doctrine of the Church" and are "out of touch with what many in the Church believe".

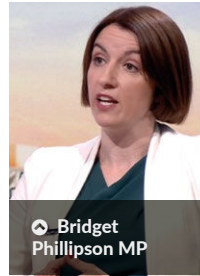


 THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Free speech law ditched by Education Secretary

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has shelved a new law that would have helped universities to protect and promote free speech.

Just days before it was due to come into effect, Phillipson announced that she would "stop further commencement" of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. She claimed that it would have impacted "vulnerable groups" and exposed providers "to costly



legal action".

But in an open letter, over 500 academics said that university staff and students need the Act's protections.

They highlighted how hundreds "have been hounded, censured, silenced

or even sacked over the last 20 years for the expression of legal opinions". They also argued that it would save universities money on court costs, "by providing a speedy and efficient way of resolving what would otherwise be protracted legal disputes".

Last year, the Office for Students proposed a 'free speech complaints scheme' for students, staff and visitors. However, its future is also now uncertain.

Children benefit from new puberty blockers protection

Puberty blockers are now banned for gender-confused children across the UK.

Emergency legislation protects under-18s from obtaining the drugs via private prescriptions from the UK or Europe. It was set to expire on 3 September but has now been extended until 26 November and will include Northern Ireland along with the rest of the UK.

The decision was based on recommendations from the independent Cass Review.

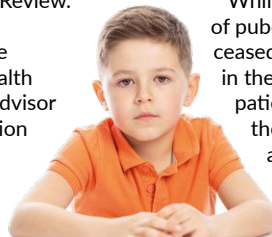
Ahead of the announcement, the Department of Health and Social Care's advisor on suicide prevention debunked claims from pro-trans

activists that restricting access to puberty blockers had increased suicides.

However, the British Medical Association voted to lobby officials against Dr Hilary Cass's recommendations. This prompted criticism from over 1,400 doctors, with some resigning as members.

Former BMA chairman James Johnson said he was "horrified and saddened by the direction taken by the organisation".

While routine prescription of puberty blockers has ceased for new child patients in the UK, some NHS patients will be placed on the experimental drugs as part of a new clinical trial.



Lib Dems admit victimising member

The Liberal Democrats have admitted to victimising a party member over her gender-critical beliefs.



Natalie Bird was accused of sharing "transphobic material" and suspended after wearing a top that defined a woman as an "adult human female".

After a three-and-a-half-year battle, the party accepted that it discriminated against Bird because of her belief in biological reality.

Pro-lifer awarded £13,000 after silent prayer arrest

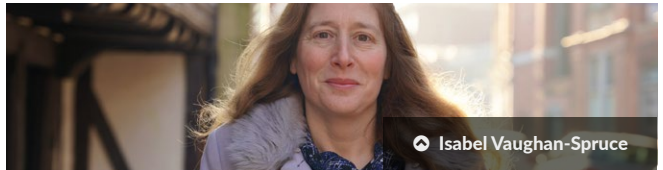
Pro-life campaigner Isabel Vaughan-Spruce has received £13,000 and an apology from the police after being wrongfully arrested for praying silently inside a 'censorship zone' near an abortion clinic in Birmingham.

In a statement, Miss Vaughan-Spruce said: "Silent prayer is not a crime. Nobody should be arrested merely for the thoughts they have in their heads – yet this happened to me twice at the hands of the West Midlands Police, who

explicitly told me that 'prayer is an offence'".

Former Cabinet Minister Lord Frost called it "incredible that people have been arrested for thoughtcrime in modern Britain".

Censorship zones that seek to criminalise prayer outside abortion centres will be introduced from 31 October 2024. Pro-lifers face unlimited fines if they are deemed to have influenced 'someone's decision to have an abortion, obstruct them, or cause harassment or distress' within 150m of centres.



Isabel Vaughan-Spruce

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Welsh Govt axes sex offender's 'conversion practices' research

The Welsh Government has ditched a research contract after it was revealed the company it had commissioned to conduct a 'conversion practices' study is run by a convicted sex offender.

Last year, the Welsh Government contracted Laurel Research Consulting Ltd to assess the "experiences of conversion practices among people aged 18+ in Wales" to "inform

future policy development".

James Mullen, who founded and directs the firm, was imprisoned for eight months in 2013 and would have still been on the sex offenders

register when the research was commissioned.

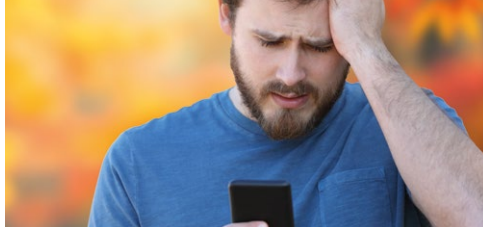
In light of the findings, a Government spokesperson revealed that it has terminated the contract.



Institute calls on Government to tackle gambling 'Wild West'

The Christian Institute has urged the Culture Secretary to introduce tighter restrictions on gambling, following the Government's manifesto pledge to tackle the issue.

In a letter to Lisa Nandy, Institute Director Ciarán Kelly warned that gambling has become an all-pervasive part of life in modern Britain, leaving a trail of personal and social chaos. He highlighted advertising, child protection and online stake limits as three areas which could be swiftly addressed.



Mr Kelly wrote: "From gambling logos on football shirts to betting ads on social media, there is no escaping it. It exploits the most vulnerable and desperate in our society.

"We welcome the Government's manifesto pledge

to reform gambling regulation and call on the Culture Secretary to act quickly to hold gambling firms to account. There is too much of the 'Wild West' about the UK's current gambling laws. The time to act is now."

The Institute opposed the 2005

Gambling Act, warning of the damage that would come from deregulation.

Mr Kelly added: "Sadly, many of our predictions have come true. Two decades on, there is an urgent need to bring gambling law up to date and improve protections for the vulnerable."

In response, the Minister for Gambling told the Institute the Government "recognises the impact gambling can have", and is committed to reform.

Ask us to visit your church

We have over 60,000 supporters and visit over 300 churches a year to talk about key issues for Christians.



If you would like your church to be one of them, email us at: development@christian.org.uk

Police told to "record more non-crime 'hate' incidents"

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper wants to force police officers to record even more 'non-crime hate incidents' (NCHIs).

NCHIs can show up on safeguarding checks and prevent those affected getting a job.

But Cooper plans to reverse the previous Government's policy for police to only record personal data if someone presents "a real risk" of either "significant harm" or a "future criminal



offence". The move comes despite the number of NCHIs continuing to rise.

The Institute's Director Ciarán Kelly said the existing guidance had been brought in because "far too many people" were having incidents

recorded against them, sometimes for "the most trivial of reasons".

He told The Daily Telegraph that Cooper's proposed "zero tolerance" measures should "give pause to everyone who values free speech".

Safeguard pupils from trans ideology, teachers urge Govt

Well over 100 teachers and other education professionals have called for an end to ideologically driven teaching on gender and sex in schools.

In a letter to the Education Secretary, co-ordinated by The Christian Institute, they urged Bridget Phillipson to finalise and implement three key pieces of draft guidance: Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 (KCSIE); Gender Questioning Children; and Relationships, Sex and Health Education.

The signatories backed the removal of phrases promoted by Stonewall from the

2023 version of KCSIE, saying they prevented schools “from acting on the risk that children who adopt a trans identity might harm themselves”.

They argued that the guidance on Gender Questioning Children was needed, as some schools were still operating “a policy of automatic ‘affirmation’”.

Strengths of the RSHE guidance identified in the letter include the requirement for

schools not to teach “gender identity”, and minimum age limits for more sensitive material.

In July, the Institute’s Head of Education, John Denning, criticised trans-affirming draft guidance on bullying produced by the National Society for Church of England schools. He warned that fixating on protected characteristics risked harming children by failing to acknowledge bullying for other reasons.



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CI appoints new Director

The Christian Institute has appointed Ciarán Kelly as its new Director, following the sudden death of Colin Hart in March.

Mr Kelly, who joined the Institute in 2014, has been promoted to the position on a permanent basis, after stepping in as Acting Director during the four-month recruitment process.

The Institute’s Chairman of Trustees, Revd Dr Richard Turnbull, said: “There is no one more suited to lead the Institute for the challenges that lie ahead.”

The new Director asked for prayer, and invited all Bible-believing Christians to join with the Institute in “speaking up for what is good and right and true, and contending for the relevance of God’s moral law to all people in our own day”.



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