

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London
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6 April 2022

Confusion around conversion therapy proposals

Dear Prime Minister,

We are deeply concerned about the chaos and confusion that seems to be driving the government's approach to conversion therapy. The lack of clarity helps no-one.

The consultation process highlighted many of the issues facing the government in meeting its twin commitments – to end coercive and abusive practices while ensuring people can receive the prayer and spiritual support they choose. The decision not to proceed with a new Conversion Therapy Bill, revealed by a leak, seemed to be the right outcome delivered in the wrong way. A subsequent partial U-turn has now created further uncertainty.

The Evangelical Alliance is the oldest and largest body representing the UK's two million evangelical Christians. In response to our previous letter, you confirmed that the government "will continue to allow adults to receive appropriate pastoral support (including prayer), in churches and other religious settings, in the exploration of their sexual orientation or gender identity". We celebrate that everyone is made in the image of God and in this Easter season we are reminded of the invitation into a transformational relationship through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Many were encouraged to hear last week that: "Having explored this sensitive issue in great depth the government has decided to proceed by reviewing how existing law can be deployed more effectively to prevent this in the quickest way possible, and explore the use of other non-legislative measures." Within hours this position was reversed. It is difficult to see how months of legal scrutiny could suddenly be found wanting.

Conversion therapy is an emotive topic. The lack of a clear definition adds to the confusion and often leads to those with different views talking past one another. For clarity, the Evangelical Alliance does not support disreputable practices claiming to 'cure' those who are gay or transgender.

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The decision not to include gender identity in any new law is a positive step meaning parents, counsellors and youth workers will not be criminalised for helping vulnerable young people. The risk is that the government press ahead with legislation on gay conversion therapy to be seen to be doing something. This would be despite acknowledging that the existing criminal law framework already protects against acts done in the name of conversion therapy.

There is widespread agreement about the need to end coercive and abusive practices. Polling shows support for personal choice when it comes to questions of sexuality and gender. There is also significant support for the Christian understanding of marriage and ensuring that everyday Christians can hold their beliefs and pastor others of every age in line with those beliefs.

We acknowledge your previous commitment not to see “clergy and church members criminalised for normal non-coercive activity” and hope and pray we can work together to make that a reality.

Yours sincerely,

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cc:

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