



December 6, 2020

Dear Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights:

LGBT Youthline and The 519 are writing to you to put our joint support behind Bill-C6, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy)*, with a proposed amendment.

LGBT YouthLine is a Queer, Trans, Two-Spirit youth-led organization that affirms and supports the experiences of youth (29 and under) across Ontario. We do this by providing anonymous peer support and referrals; training youth to provide support to other youth; and providing resources so youth can make informed decisions.

For over 25 years, LGBT YouthLine has directly supported thousands of 2SLGBTQ across Ontario each year, a majority of whom are either trans, non-binary or questioning their gender identity. Every day, we witness the immense difference a supportive environment can make on the mental health and well-being of a young person who is looking for resources or just a supportive conversation to explore their identity. So many of the youth we talk to feel less suicidal or hopeless when they feel accepted and validated for the first time by a peer on our HelpLine.

The 519 is an LGBTQ2S community centre and City of Toronto agency that has been involved in organizing and advocating for the rights of LGBTQ2S communities for more than four decades. As an organization, we are committed to the health, happiness and full participation of our communities. We strive to make a real difference in people's lives, while working to promote inclusion, understanding and respect. The 519 delivers direct programs and services for the most vulnerable and marginalized, which includes anti-violence and access to justice initiatives.

Too often families, educators and religious spaces are unsupportive and push youth to believe that they are *"just in a phase"*. Both organizations jointly witness the devastating impacts of these struggles faced by youth in their direct care networks. Many youth we engage with experience thoughts of suicidality and extreme distress due to their unsupportive environments where they are being forced to be someone they are not. LGBTQ2S youth face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance misuse. Surveys of Toronto students have shown that only 35% of LGBTQ2S youth in grades 10-12 state they have a middle to high level of emotional wellbeing, compared to 65% for their heterosexual, cisgender peers.

The existence and legitimacy of LGBTQ2S identities is not a topic for debate. Youth being forced to speak with adults who coerce them into not shifting their gender identity is a form of conversion therapy. While these conversations do not seem like 'conversion therapy', they have extremely adverse impacts on a young person's sense of self and wellbeing that lasts well into adulthood. In its current form, Bill C-6 narrowly defines conversion therapy, excluding practitioners who insist that they are not intending to "change a person's... gender identity" but whose goal is nevertheless to discourage or delay the adoption of gender identities not assigned at birth, as well as non-conforming gender expressions. In alignment with the *Centre for Gender and Sexual Health Equity*, we call for amendments to sections 320.101 ("definition of conversion therapy"), 320.101 (a) and (b) ("exclusions"), and 320.102 (2) ("forced conversion

therapy”), in order to: include conversion therapy targeting gender expression; more clearly define conversion therapy as including practices that regard a gender identity not assigned at birth as disordered or less desirable; and assert that consent is not valid, if risks associated with conversion therapy are not clearly explained to the patient.

While we support the intent and action of the Bill, we request that the Government review the proposed amendment to more clearly define conversion therapy practices that trans Canadians experience. In addition, we ask the Government to communicate other proactive strategies that will be used— beyond legislative amendments to the Criminal Code— to ensure equitable access to trans-affirming information and supports for trans people of all ages (including youth), as well as their families, communities, and service and support workers, across the country.

LGBT YouthLine and The 519’s joint experience in supporting LGBTQ2S youth has shown that giving youth information, resources, and care reduces suicidality and mental health distress. Lack of support and coercion leads to trauma and a deterioration of mental health, both which take years to reverse. Everyone, including youth, deserve agency, compassion, care and the ability to determine who they are. Everyone, including youth, deserves the right to be able to explore and make decisions that work for them.

Sincerely,



Berkha Gupta
Executive Director
LGBT YouthLine



Justin Khan
Director, Public Interest and Legal Initiatives
The 519