

Dear Marwin Tabara

On behalf of Forward Church we'd like to thank you for serving our riding. We appreciate the significant work you do for our community and the important role you play.

The reason we are writing you today is that as a church we have significant concern regarding bill C-6.

We want to start by stating our support for banning coercive and involuntary practices that have the intent of changing someone's sexual orientation. Such practices have no place within our communities.

We recognize that many people who have experienced conversion therapy describe despair and suicidal ideation as a consequence. We recognize that initiatives to ban conversion therapy arise from a desire to protect Canadians from such damaging effects.

Our concern is not with what we believe the intent of Bill C-6 is, but with the scope of it. We are particularly concerned with the definition of conversion therapy proposed in Bill C-6, which goes beyond efforts to change a person's sexuality or gender, and includes practices, treatments and services to *"repress or reduce... sexual behaviour."*

Such a broad definition could pose a significant risk to the freedom of religious expression, instruction and practice. An important aspect of religious identity is to learn and to share the teaching of sacred texts about how we should conduct ourselves in all areas of life, including human sexuality and sexual behaviour.

As currently written Bill C-6 opens the door to the possibility that conversations within families, including private conversations between parents and their children on matters of human sexuality, could be deemed public and subject to prosecution, thus restricting the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their religious and ethical convictions.

Also of great concern to us as a church is how the provisions in Bill C-6 may be applied to public religious instruction. Given the lack of clarification within the bill we are left to wonder whether instruction or public expression, such as a sermon series or youth bible study on biblical sexual ethics, be construed as "a practice, treatment or service?" And since the definition of conversion therapy includes reducing sexual behaviour, could programs offered in a church or ministry setting that consider sexual activity and promote abstinence for all teens, regardless of orientation, be captured by the legislation?

We are concerned that this legislation could, by imposing criminal sanctions, penalize and silence public speech and religious instruction on matters of sexuality and gender.

Further, we note that the terms “practice, treatment or service,” while often used in a medical or therapeutic context, are not defined in Bill C-6 and can be interpreted and applied various ways. As written, these terms could include voluntarily sought out support groups for those who choose to live their lives in accordance with their religious beliefs.

In light of these concerns, we would urge you to advocate for changes to Bill C-6 that would clarify the definition of conversion therapy and add exceptions that clearly protect religious faith and practice as well as family conversations and parental rights.

While Canadians may disagree upon many things, we must remain united in our resolve to respect the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression that make Canada so great. Bill C-6 as currently written threatens to undermine the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion, both cherished charter rights that are foundational to a thriving, pluralistic democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Derik Fuller and Kirk Giles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Derik" being the most prominent.

Derik Fuller and Kirk Giles  
Lead Pastors, Forward Church