Coalition for Marriage

Giving Evidence on the Conversion Practices Bill

A guide for marriage supporters from Coalition for Marriage (C4M). Parliament is taking evidence on the draft Bill until 5pm on Monday 16 November 2026.

The Bill would make words a crime in the family home and in church.[2]

Got five minutes? Do this

Unfortunately, the committee's form takes evidence only as an uploaded document, such as a Word file.[1]

1. Open a new Word document or whatever you use to save text files. At the top, type "Question 15" if you're a parent, or "Question 16" if you want to speak up for prayer and pastoral care.[1]
2. Underneath, write three or four short paragraphs in your own words, numbered 1, 2, 3. Say who you are, and what this Bill would mean for you, your family or your church, but leave out your contact details. Don't name your children or anyone else. End with: "Recommend: drop the Bill."[1]
3. Save it as a Word document somewhere you'll find it again, such as your desktop, then read "Before you send" below.
4. Go to committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/4010/ and click "Start submission" at the foot of the page.[1] Click "Continue" on each of the next two pages. Choose "Individual", then "Continue". Fill in your details, upload your saved file and send it.
5. Then ask a friend to do the same.

Stuck? Ask someone in your family or church to help you upload it, or email the committee for help at draftbills@parliament.uk.[1]

Got twenty minutes? Say more

You needn't answer all 16 questions.[1] From the questions below, pick two or three you can speak to and, for each, write a few numbered paragraphs under its question number, ending with what you want the committee to recommend.

Why your evidence matters

The Government's draft Conversion Practices Bill would make words a crime in the family home and in church. Its own Explanatory Notes say many violent acts are "already prohibited by existing criminal offences", but not conversion practices "which consist of verbal or non-violent physical acts".[2] A parent or a pastor could face up to five years in prison if a court decides they meant to change someone's sexual orientation or transgender identity, and that their "psychological or emotional pressure" was abusive and caused "serious alarm or distress", badly affecting daily life.[3] And the Bill doesn't mention marriage. Nothing in it protects what anyone says about marriage, sex or the family.

On 18 October the Minister for Women and Equalities, Bridget Phillipson, promised the Bill "will not impinge" on freedom of expression, religious practice or "decisions on how to parent".[4] But not one of those promises is in the Bill. Its only exemption is for health care.[3] Parents, pastors and free speech about marriage got only promises.

Now Parliament's joint committee on the draft Bill is asking the public for evidence.[1] The first six witnesses it called, for 29 October, came from Stonewall, Galop, the Ban Conversion

Practices Coalition, Gay Men's Network, Sex Matters and LGB Alliance. Not one came from a church, a parents' group or a marriage organisation.[5] Even so, one of the committee's own members, the Labour MP Naz Shah, told that hearing: "Parents fall into this bill."[6] The committee will hear our side only if we send it.

The committee only takes evidence that hasn't been published anywhere else, so there's no wording here to copy.[1] What you send has to be yours, in your own words, and that's what makes it count.

The points to make, question by question

The committee says it "particularly" wants to hear the recommendations you'd have it make, so each section below ends with one.[1]

Questions 1 and 2 - is the Bill needed?

The committee asks (question 2): "To what extent does the draft Bill address conduct and harms that are not currently dealt with effectively under existing legislation?" And (question 1a): "What are the benefits of defining conversion practices in legislation?"[1]

- Abuse is already a crime. The Government's own notes say the gap is "particularly" conversion practices "which consist of verbal or non-violent physical acts".[2] So the new crime is aimed at words.
- The Government's equality assessment calls the gap in existing law "narrow".[7]
- It admits "there is no direct causal evidence" of what conversion practices do, only "correlational data", which it calls "strong" and "consistent".[7] A correlation, however strong, can't show what caused what.

Recommend: drop the Bill, and enforce the laws against abuse we already have.

Question 3 - Scotland, and the rest of the UK

The committee asks (question 3): "What implications, if any, arise from different approaches being taken across the UK, and are any amendments to the draft Bill needed?"[1]

- The Bill "extends to England and Wales only".[3]
- But Scotland's Government wants to explore extending it. Its Minister for Equalities and International Development has written that "We are committed to working with the UK Government in good faith to explore extending the Bill to cover Scotland following the pre-legislative scrutiny period".[8]
- If you live in Scotland, send your evidence too. Scotland's Government has told the joint committee it may "find it valuable to hear directly from Scottish stakeholders who have contributed to the development of policy and legislation in this area".[9]

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, write protection for parents, prayer and pastoral care into the Bill itself, so that it holds wherever the Bill goes.

Questions 5 to 8 - what counts as abuse

The committee asks (question 7): "Are the thresholds for criminal liability appropriate and sufficiently clear?"[1]

- The Bill calls “any conduct” meant to change someone’s sexual orientation or transgender identity a “conversion practice”, abusive or not.[3] So a loving parent’s gentle word is, in the Bill’s own terms, a “conversion practice”.
- No intent to harm is needed. Nothing in the Bill requires the prosecution to prove that the accused meant to cause any harm, or even foresaw it.[3]
- Acting reasonably is no defence, and nothing in the Bill needs the conduct to be repeated, so one conversation could be enough.[3]
- The Bill’s test of abuse considers any “use of economic pressure” or “psychological or emotional pressure”.[3] The Bill never says what either means, and the Government’s notes say only what each “could include”.[2] Parenting runs on both - pocket money, a worried word, a disappointed look. Persuasion isn’t abuse.
- Bridget Phillipson says “the legal bar set is high”, because a prosecution would have to prove the acts “caused serious physical or psychological harm”.[4] But the Bill doesn’t need any harm to health - “serious alarm or distress”, badly affecting daily life, is enough.[3] And the Government wants the committee to consider whether the Bill should “go further” on that harm test.[10] So the very safeguard Ministers point to is the one they’ve invited the committee to lower.

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, no offence without intent to harm, a defence for acting reasonably, and no lower harm test.

Questions 10 and 13 - protection orders and family law

The committee asks (question 10): “How adequate are the conversion practice protection orders?” And (question 13): “Are there further considerations around existing family law that should be taken account of in relation to the draft Bill?”[1]

- Bridget Phillipson says refusing to “use preferred pronouns” is “not caught” by the Bill.[4] Yet nothing in the Bill stops a court ordering a parent to use them, and breaking an order carries up to two years in prison.[3] So what isn’t a crime could become one.
- In a divorce or a child arrangements case, the court can make an order “without a separate application being made”.[2] The court can even make the order without giving the other side the notice the usual rules require.[3]
- The police or the local council can apply directly, and so can anyone else the court allows - the Government’s examples are “a teacher, a friend or a family member”.[10] So a council could ask a court to stop parents taking their own child to church.
- Nothing in the Bill asks whether the person to be “protected” wants the order.[3] Its test for making an order is almost word for word the one in the law on forced marriage, which goes on to make the court consider the person’s own “wishes and feelings”.[11] This Bill leaves that out.[3] So a court could bar a pastor from praying with an adult who asked them to.

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, no order in family proceedings unless someone applies and the other side is told, the person’s own wishes and feelings considered, and no order that dictates what anyone says.

Question 11 - churches, charities and schools

The committee asks (question 11): “Does the draft Bill risk creating any adverse effects on public, private or charity sector organisations, including education settings?”[1]

- Under clause 5, if a church commits the offence, any “member of the governing body”, such as a trustee or elder, who “fails to take all reasonable steps to prevent” it commits it too. In a church run by its members, so does any member who fails to take those steps.[3] And the surest of “all reasonable steps” would be for a church to stop teaching on marriage and sexuality altogether.
- A charity found to be carrying out the offence “will be required to cease carrying out the practice”, and could lose its charitable status, the equality assessment says.[7]
- The Bill’s only exemption is for health care, so teachers, youth workers and social workers have none.[3] If that’s you, tell the committee what the label “conversion practice” would do to your work.

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, no trustee, elder or member made liable for what they took no part in.

Question 12 - free speech about marriage

The committee asks (question 12): “To what extent does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse, and other rights around privacy and family life, and freedom of expression?”[1]

- When Parliament redefined marriage in 2013, the Government called the belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman “mainstream, legitimate and lawful”, and said it “will protect the right to express it”.[12]
- In the law on stirring up hatred, Parliament wrote that “any discussion or criticism of marriage which concerns the sex of the parties to marriage shall not be taken of itself to be threatening or intended to stir up hatred”.[13] This Bill carries nothing like it.[3]
- If a son says he’s a girl, and his mother tells him he’s a boy, hoping he’ll come to believe it, her words fit the Bill’s definition of a conversion practice.[3] Marriage rests on that same truth, that there are men and women.

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, no Bill unless it protects free speech about marriage, sex and the family at least as strongly as Parliament did when it redefined marriage.

Question 14 - health care

The committee asks (question 14): “How adequate or appropriate is the existing exemption for healthcare services and related organisations?”[1]

- Health care is the Bill’s only exemption. A doctor is caught only if they act in a way that “falls far below the standards reasonably expected of a person in their position”.[3]
- Say a doctor and a mother tell a teenager the same thing, in the same room. The doctor is covered by the Bill’s one exemption, for health care. The mother is not.[3] So the same words, meant the same way, can be a conversion practice from the mother but not from the doctor.

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, give a parent’s guidance at least the protection the Bill gives a doctor’s.

Question 15 - parents and children

The committee asks (question 15): "How far does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse and those who hold parental rights and responsibilities regarding a child's upbringing?"[1]

- On 25 June Olivia Bailey, presenting the Bill to MPs, was asked whether parents who refuse consent for a child to transition would be caught by it. She promised it "will not impact the ability of parents to parent how they wish", then refused them any exemption, saying "I do not think that it is appropriate for such an exemption to be in place in this legislation".[14] So a mother or father has no protection in the Bill, only a Minister's word.
- On 22 October Rosie Duffield MP asked whether a parent "declining to support their child's gender transition" would fall within the Bill's definition of an abusive conversion practice. The Government's answer, on 29 October, didn't say no. It said that "Acts will not be criminalised unless they meet the high thresholds set out in the draft Bill".[15] So a parent who declines can be caught, if a court finds those thresholds met.
- At the hearing on 29 October, one of the committee's own members, the Labour MP Naz Shah, said that "In some instances, just refusing to affirm a child's identity could actually cause huge amounts of alarm and distress and psychological issues". She asked a witness from the Ban Conversion Practices Coalition: "As much as you say it's a high bar, it's not then, is it?" And she added: "Parents fall into this bill."[6]
- Labour's own Preet Kaur Gill MP, a health minister until July, has warned that "by criminalising words that amount to 'economic' and 'emotional pressure'", the Bill could "ensnare parents who simply want to properly examine the risks involved with early 'transition', and where appropriate, advise against rushing into the use of such serious interventions".[16]
- The Bill makes no distinction between a child and an adult. It speaks only of "an individual".[3] Yet every parent sets rules for a child that they'd never set for another adult.
- If you're a parent, tell the committee - without naming your child - what you'd say if your child questioned their sexuality or their sex, and whether this Bill would make you afraid to say it.

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, no Bill unless it protects a parent's guidance of their own child on its face.

Question 16 - prayer, preaching and pastoral care

The committee asks (question 16): "How far does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse, and other rights around freedom of religion and belief, conscience, and expression?"[1]

- The Government's equality assessment says its approach ensures "the bill is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights", naming Article 9, on freedom of religion.[7] That article protects religion lived out "in public or private", "in worship, teaching, practice and observance".[17] Prayer is worship, preaching is teaching and pastoral care is practice. Yet nothing in the Bill protects prayer, preaching or pastoral care.[3]

- The Bill's provisions "do not allow for consent", the equality assessment admits.[7] "I do not think someone can consent to abuse", Olivia Bailey told MPs.[14] So if an adult asks their pastor to pray with them, the pastor has no defence that the adult asked.
- The Government's own evidence counts "spiritual, religious, or faith-based activities (such as prayer healing)" as the commonest form reported, at 65 per cent.[10] So by the Government's own count, religious practice is what this Bill targets most.
- The Government's Explanatory Notes say the Bill is "not intended to interfere" with religious belief and expression, yet those same notes "do not form part of the draft Conversion Practices Bill".[2] An intention in a note binds no court.
- If you've given or received prayer or pastoral care, tell the committee who asked for it, and whether it was freely chosen and free to stop at any time.

Recommend: drop the Bill. Failing that, no Bill unless it protects, on its face, religious teaching and preaching, and the prayer, pastoral care and talking therapy an adult freely asks for.

Your own experience counts most

The committee can read the Bill for itself. Only you can tell it who you are, what you do and what this Bill would mean for you. You might be a mother or father, a grandparent, a minister, a youth leader, a counsellor, a teacher, a doctor or a social worker, someone who once asked for prayer and was glad of it, or someone who has detransitioned. Parliament's own guidance asks you to "Focus on your own experiences and information".[18]

Before you send

If you're writing for your church, choose "Organisation" instead of "Individual".[1] Keep a copy of what you send.

- Save it as an ordinary Word document, which the form says must have "no repeating headers and footers" and "no decorative images or logos".[1] Parliament's guidance also rules out "uneditable formats like PDF".[18]
- Keep it short, with headings and numbered paragraphs.[18] If it runs past 3,000 words, the form asks you to include "a brief summary".[1]
- Leave your contact details out of the file, because the form asks for them separately.[18]
- What you send may be published on Parliament's website, and it then stays there for good.[1]
- Asking to be anonymous, or for confidentiality, is for "exceptional circumstances", the form says, such as evidence that "might put you at risk if made public".[1] You can ask for either by ticking a box when you upload your file.[1]
- If what you write raises safeguarding concerns about you or others, the committee has "a responsibility to raise these with the appropriate safeguarding authority".[1]
- Committees can't consider evidence about a court case that's still going on.[1] Leave out personal details about anyone else, family included, unless they've agreed, or the committee may not publish what you send.[18]

- Criticise the Bill, not people's motives - evidence that "could be defamatory" is "very unlikely to be published".[1]
- Don't put your evidence on a blog or website until the committee has published it, said you may, or turned it down.[1]

Write to your MP as well

In Parliament's own words, committees' recommendations "are not binding on the Government. But they are influential".[18] So write to your own MP as well, in your own words, and ask them to press Ministers to drop the Bill. WriteToThem finds your MP from your postcode and lets you write free, and it blocks "identikit" letters.[19] C4M has its own guide to writing to your MP.[20]

At C4M, we know that abuse is already a crime, and that a parent's guidance and a pastor's prayer must never become one. C4M is preparing its own evidence for the committee. And if Ministers meant a word of their promises, they'd have written them into the Bill, as they did for health care. They didn't, and Ministers should drop the Bill.

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