

7 December 2020

To all members of the Victorian Parliament

Dear Parliamentarians,

Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020

We write in our personal capacities and on behalf of our organisations to bear witness to LGBTQ+ members of our multicultural communities who have experienced attempts to change or suppress their sexual orientations and gender identities.

Many of our own have suffered in silence, unable to speak for fear of bringing shame to their families and communities, and still live with the life-long trauma and dislocation caused by people who believe them to be sick, diseased and in need of 'fixing', 'curing' or 'changing'. We write for them and to honour their experiences; to welcome the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020; to implore you to support the Bill; and to thank those that do.

As members, allies and researchers of these affected communities, we have seen and heard first-hand the trauma and devastation caused by LGBTQ+ conversion practices within our multifaith, multicultural communities.

We have heard and documented the accounts of people who have been taken to doctors and religious leaders to be 'cured'. Parents who have pulled their children out of school and taken them to places of worship, or even overseas, in search of change.

Religious leaders of different faiths that have told us that homosexuality is a 'disease' needing a 'cure' and that it is not indigenous to our communities and cultures. They have told us that they would refer people to 'appropriate' medical organisations to deal with their 'problem', and that they have had repeated contact with people whose 'desires' they have tried to change or suppress.

Community and welfare workers have reported to us families that have attempted to 'fix' such 'problems' within their families. And we've heard community leaders espouse violence, understood as the controlling of someone's life, as a 'way for correction'.

But we have also heard accounts of people who have been walked into mosques after coming out to Sheikhs and Christian leaders who have opened their church doors to gays and lesbians, despite the personal repercussions to themselves.

It is beyond time for this senseless damage to people to stop. We need laws that build understanding through processes that bring people and communities together. This Bill overwhelmingly does that, criminalising the most egregious forms of conversion practices that cause injury while providing pathways for voluntary facilitation and investigations when conduct is serious or systemic.

This Bill provides an important foundation towards building understanding for LGBTQ+ people from multicultural backgrounds with others within their communities, and sends an important message in protecting people from harm. It affirms that all people should be free to belong as members of their faith and multicultural communities, and as Victorians.

We hope that you will support the Bill and thank you if you do.

Yours sincerely,



Ghassan Kassisieh

Legal Director, Equality Australia
Author of *'We're Family Too: The effects of homophobia in Arabic-speaking communities in NSW'*



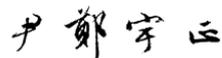
Dr Judy Tang

Victorian Multicultural Commissioner,
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Nathan Despott
On behalf of the Steering Committee, Brave
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