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Mike Freer MP, Minister for Equalities

cc:

Liz Truss MP, Minister for Women and Equalities
Kemi Badenoch MP, Minister for Equalities
Jacob Rees Mogg, Leader of the House of Commons
Marcus Bell, Director, Equality Hub, Cabinet Office

December 2 2021

Dear Mike Freer

We are writing to you urgently to ask you to reconsider the rushed six week consultation on the governments plan to criminalise “conversion therapy”. This is a complex and important question and it deserves sufficient time for all sections of the public who are affected to engage.

We are particularly concerned that with little over a week left of the consultation period, a critical version of the document has not even been published.

At the outset of the consultation an “easy reading” version was promised, and earlier this week “version 5” of the Easy Reading version appeared on the consultation webpage and then was quickly withdrawn.

Easy read documents are designed to make it possible for people with a learning disability to access information. We understand that publication of the easy reading version is still planned, but with just a few days left before the consultation closes this is not acceptable. How can people with learning difficulties be expected to get to grips with the policy and formulate their answers to the questions in just a few days, when others have been given six weeks? Furthermore, if the GEO is struggling to

Sex Matters is a human rights organisation
campaigning for clarity about sex in law, policy and language

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explain the policy clearly in simple terms, this itself suggests the government itself is not clear enough about the content of and justification for its own policy.

This is a point on which we agree with Stonewall: the proposal lacks clarity. It is not clear what behaviour might see a parent, teacher, therapist, youth worker or charity volunteer subject to criminal investigation and threatened with imprisonment or a fine, and a criminal record.

There is a duty on public authorities to consider how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010. The short consultation period makes meaningful engagement with this question difficult for anyone who wishes to respond, but the even shorter consultation period for people with learning difficulties is unconscionable and discriminatory.

We are also writing to Baroness Kishwer Falkner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission asking them to make a clear statement that producing an easy read version of the consultation with just a few days to go before the end of a consultation effectively destroys the ability of people with learning disabilities to make any meaningful contribution to the process.



Naomi Cunningham
Chair, Sex Matters



Maya Forstater
Executive Director, Sex Matters