

Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Cc: Lucy Powell MP, Leader of the House of Commons

10th July 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

We are organisations and charities concerned with human rights; gay, lesbian and bisexual rights; women's and children's rights; and safeguarding, as well as groups of concerned parents, clinicians, therapists, teachers and lawyers.

We urge you to resist calls to take speedy action on gender identity and to approach with the utmost caution your manifesto pledge to deliver "a full trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices, while protecting the freedom for people to explore their sexual orientation and gender identity".

In your first speech to the nation as Prime Minister, you promised to restore respect to politics and to end "the era of noisy performance". We urge you to take this approach here, recognising the serious harms to children and young people, including gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, that could easily result from legislation in this area.

We call on you to commit to five tests that must be satisfied before going forward with any legislative approach in this area, based on the principle of "first do no harm":

1. Is there robust, contemporary evidence of abuses that cannot be prosecuted under existing legislation?
2. Will legislation ensure that normal professional standards of therapy, medical treatment for co-occurring issues, pastoral care and family life are not criminalised?
3. Will legislation be consistent with full implementation of the recommendations of the Cass Review?
4. Will legislation be compatible with other human rights, including freedom of belief, freedom of speech and right to family life?
5. In summary, will new legislation make life better for gay, gender-questioning and trans-identifying people?

Sex Matters is a human-rights charity. sex-matters.org | info@sex-matters.org

We campaign for clarity about sex in law, policy and language.

Trustees: Michael Biggs, Rebecca Bull, Julia Casimo, Naomi Cunningham, Emma Hilton. CEO: Maya Forstater

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Your government must prioritise safeguarding and avoid taking action that would undermine implementation of the recommendations of the Cass Review, or that would cut children and vulnerable people off from family support, thoughtful therapy and effective medical treatment for complex mental-health issues.

We urge you to take heed of the caution expressed by Dr Hilary Cass and by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and evidenced by the decision of the UK Council on Psychotherapy to withdraw its signature from both the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy v2 and the Coalition Against Conversion Therapy. This issue must be resolved on the basis of evidence, not tribalism.

A conversion-practices ban should not come under the remit of the Minister for Women and Equalities. Sexual orientation and gender dysphoria are quite different phenomena, and addressing them under the framework of equalities, rather than clinical understanding, medical ethics and safeguarding, will lead to oversimplification and harm. Given that the issues involved include both mental health and the criminal justice system, we propose that oversight should be jointly by the Secretaries of State for Health and Social Care and Justice.

We are ready and keen to meet with ministerial teams and senior officials.

Maya Forstater, CEO, **Sex Matters**

Stephanie Davies-Arai, Founder, **Transgender Trend**

Dr Nic Williams, Director, **Fair Play For Women**

Stella O'Malley, Founder and Director, **Genspect**

Lisa-Marie Taylor, CEO, **FiLiA**

James Esses and Terry Patterson, Co-founders, **Thoughtful Therapists**

Sarah Vine KC, **Legal Feminist**

Julie Bindel and Kathleen Stock, Co-Directors, **The Lesbian Project**

The Directors, **Gay Men's Network**

Heather Binning, Director, **Women's Rights Network**

Trina Budge, Marion Calder and Susan Smith, Co-Directors, **For Women Scotland**

Co-ordinators, **Scottish Feminist Network**

Ali Morris, Executive Committee Member, **Merched Cymru**

Maggie Mellon, Chair, **Evidence-Based Social Workers Association (EBSWA)**

Steering Committee, **Scottish Professionals Advising on Gender (ScotPAG)**

Dr Carole Sherwood, Founder, **Save Mental Health**

Richard Kirker, Acting Secretary, **LGB Christians**

Keith Jordan, Founder, **Our Duty**

Dr Val Thomas, Founder, **Critical Therapy Antidote**