

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM ELIZABETH STEVENSON

I would like to express my thanks for the opportunity you are offering to us to give feedback to your Hate Crime Bill and to make our objections known. I am writing in reference to Item 6 where it states: "Do you have views on the merits of Part 2 of the Bill, and the plans to introduce a new offence of stirring up of hatred".

The wording of your bill causes me to worry about the fact that it is open to interpretation and to misuse. The following are the reasons why I'm objecting to your proposed bill:

1. The terms of the Bill are subjective and open to abuse.
2. It does not include protection for the freedom of speech (as recommended in 2018 by Lord Bracadale in his review.
3. A free society (which I always believed Scotland to be) allows open and reasoned debate - without violence!. Our present laws already allow for such, and therefore I believe there's no need to introduce further and more importantly, restrictive legislation.
4. Our present liberty, freedom of speech and thought would be REMOVED by this Bill.
5. I worry that under the terms of your Bill that it would be possible to commit an offence unknowingly because of the lack of clarity in the phrase 'hate crime' and 'stirring up of hatred'. As I said before, this is open to interpretation because it does not state exactly what these crimes are, therefore they can be interpreted in whichever way you want to apply it, and therefore be abused.
6. Regarding the freedom of speech clause which you propose for religious beliefs (and opinions) regarding things like sexual orientation, gender identity and so on, needs strengthening so that views can freely be openly debated and challenged without fear of committing an offence.
7. I believe that this Bill runs the risk of politically motivated people misusing it to silence their opposition.
8. I believe that trying to pass this Bill at a time when our nation is dealing with an unprecedented crisis is very worrying. I deeply believe that we must take time to give this Bill the consideration such an important matter deserves, and to properly and thoroughly debate all aspects, and to consider how this will affect day to day life in this country for all levels of society and all religious and secular persuasions.

Therefore for all the above stated reasons, and in the interests of a free and open society where freedom of speech and thought are above all respected, and not subjected to possible criminal charges I passionately raise my voice against the passing of this Bill and it being made law.

Elizabeth Stevenson

20 July 2020