

**JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

**HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL**

**SUBMISSION FROM ROY AND INGRID POULSEN**

To whom it may concern:

We are writing to express our concern about the introduction of this bill, specifically relating to Part 2 of the bill and the plans to introduce a new offence of stirring up hatred.

Our concern is that our freedom of speech will be threatened and our right to disagree, discuss and debate on issues such as sexual orientation, religious beliefs and such will be construed as inciting hatred rather than holding a different opinion or belief on a subject. We refer to Lord Bracadale's Independent Review of Hate Crime in Scotland where he expressed concern that the Scottish Government's Bill needed a clear distinction between "rational argument" and "rabble rousing". He also accepted that the right to free speech "protects expression which shocks, offends and disturbs other people". The Bill does not give the protection to free speech that Lord Bracadale recommends.

Religious beliefs and views on morality are matters which people should be able to discuss and debate and change their minds on. This must be protected by a free society.

It is also our concern that the new stirring up hatred offences could be committed by someone who did not intend their words to provoke hatred or even realise that their words could be considered abusive.

It is our opinion that the existing criminal law already covers abusive or threatening behaviour likely to cause fear, or alarm and no new law is needed.

Yours faithfully,

Roy and Ingrid Poulsen

21 July 2020