

**JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

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

**SUBMISSION FROM SNIZHORT FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND ISLE OF SKYE**

I write on behalf of the local congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in order to express our serious misgivings about this proposed legislation.

As currently drafted, the Bill appears to have little by way of legal safeguard other than that of race. A host of issues from the theological to the moral could fall foul of this legislation and many innocent people could find themselves in breach of the law as a result.

Issues of religious belief and morality are always areas of debate and surely in a free society that must be protected. There is a serious risk that malice could lead to ordinary, law abiding Christians being bullied, legally pursued, silenced and, in extreme cases even removed from employment as a result of the vague and inadequate protection afforded by the Bill. A charge of stirring up hatred would have a devastating effect on someone's life, mental health and career and there are simply not sufficient safeguards in the Bill.

As a congregation we have members who work in both the public and private sector and they are very concerned that their normal social interactions could lead to an accusation of abusive behaviour. By its very nature abusive behaviour is very subjective and open to wide interpretation and grievous misinterpretation. We believe that actually there are already perfectly adequate legal protections under existing criminal law and that this legislation is unnecessary. It is certainly unwelcome in its current shape.

We note that the Review by Lord Bracadale, (whose roots lie in these very parts), stressed the need for a clear distinction between legitimate, normal debate and abusive rabble rousing. Sadly the Bill in its current form does not come close to reflecting the noble Lord's advice.

Snizhort Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Isle of Skye  
21 July 2020