

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM GREENVIEW EVANGELICAL CHURCH

I am writing on behalf of Greenview Church in Pollokshaws, Glasgow. We are a church of around 180 members and over 200 attendees on the southside of Glasgow. We appreciate the opportunity to share our views on the Bill in question and trust that these will be taken into account by the Committee.

As Christians we share the concern that people should not be subject to hatred or abuse because of any characteristic of their person. We stand against hatred and prejudice in all forms. Further, while we do not encourage blasphemy, we can understand why in Scotland's largely secular context this now arcane law is being removed from the statute books.

As currently drafted, however, we would have some serious concerns about the omission of a free speech clause on matters of gender identity (which seems to be included in relation to religious proselytising and discussion or criticism of sexual conduct). As has been evident in the media recently, reasonable people have concerns about various aspects of transgender issues and their practical implications (JK Rowling being a prominent example). There should be space in a democratic society to voice divergent opinions from the mainstream media and even government consensus. Free speech is something that our country has spilled blood to preserve, and any Bill of this nature should protect such speech and allow the space to voice disagreement and robust criticism, even on sensitive matters.

The current laws already provide protection against behaving in a threatening or abusive manner which causes fear or alarm. However the wording in this current Bill ('stir up' hatred, or speech that is 'likely' to stir up hatred) seems both hard to define and possible to exploit.

Increasingly in our culture, disagreement of any sort is quickly characterised as abusive, bigoted and an attack on an individual's personhood. While we should want to protect people from the sort of abuse that is characterised by name calling and intent to harm, we ask that this unclear and highly subjective wording be removed in favour of something much more clear and objective, allowing for robust disagreement in areas of religion, sexuality and gender.

We hope that submissions such as this will be taken seriously and that unintended

consequences will not follow a Bill that intends to protect people, but which will actually create a new category of victim: those who disagree with the accepted norm.

We greatly appreciate the diligent work of the Justice Committee.

Greenview Evangelical Church
24 July 2020