

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM STEPHEN CARTER

I attended the public consultation on this Bill in Edinburgh recently. That meeting reflected a wide range of people with varying views about religion, atheism, gender identity etc. What quite surprised me was the almost universal concern about freedom of expression among the delegates. I am puzzled and disappointed therefore that the proposed legislation appears to ignore these concerns and lacks the safeguards present in the parallel legislation in England and Wales. As it stands, the legislation appears to confuse the holding of different opinions with hatred and would make any expression of disagreement a potentially criminal offence. It would therefore give licence to those inclined to make vexatious claims against those with whom they disagree. I would urge your committee to revisit this legislation to maintain the freedoms that our predecessors gained at such cost.

Stephen Carter
11 July 2020