

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM ELIZABETH BROWN

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to state my concern over some of the proposed changes to the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill, particularly the wording around issues of freedom of speech and the definitions about whether disagreeing with a certain position can be construed as deliberate hate crime or intending to cause harm or incite discomfort or even hate.

I am deeply concerned that our free society seems to be having views mandated by government and where only certain ideas can be discussed freely or without concern of retribution or being misunderstood.

I believe that as a modern, civilised society we should be able to discuss varying views and consider opinions from various sources. In no way do I think hateful speech or discrimination should be tolerated, however my concern is that discussing or sharing views, even privately, could be twisted or misconstrued as 'hate speech', according to proposed legislation in this bill.

It is important that religious and non-religious groups have freedom to practice peacefully, without fear of legal action against them. People should feel free to challenge beliefs and have robust discussions without this being open to legal accusations of criticism. Again, overtly threatening conduct should not be tolerated, however I feel the Bill needs much clearer language to ensure the safety of sharing differences in opinions. Legitimate debate is very different to explicit or deliberate discrimination and our society should be able to distinguish between these. Do we want a country where people of all ages, races, genders, beliefs feel unsafe in expressing a view or personal choice? I believe that unless this Bill is more succinct, and the purpose of this Bill is for the well being of ALL, and truly all, people - this Bill could become a dangerous tool, open to manipulation.

Please reconsider your proposals to allow our society to show inclusion to all, not just current or popular opinions and theories. Wording must be specific and not vague to ensure the law is clear and fair.

Thank you for your time in considering these matters,

Elizabeth Brown
12 July 2020