

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM JESSIE W BELL

Dear Sir/Madam

I wish to respond to the Scottish Government's Justice Committee scrutiny of the above Bill in the coming months.

I'm particularly concerned by the issues raised in question 6 where there are plans to introduce a new offence of stirring up hatred. It is worrying that this could be inadvertently committed in one's own home where free discussion of ideas should take place without fear of being reported. Religion, sexual ethics and transgender issues are often discussed in the quietness of our homes and some of us have very clear views on these issues. Is it going to be an offence to disagree with the beliefs and views of others? Freedom of speech is at stake here and this must be protected not criminalised. The free speech clause on religion must be stronger to protect freedom of exchange of deeply held religious ideas. There is a strong risk that this Bill could be used by those who wish to silence their opponents and exploit their own agenda.

Public church services, or private bible studies where sincere biblical and moral teaching and learning take place could be interpreted as religious hatred and the preacher/teacher prosecuted for stirring up hatred when there is no intention to do so but simply to be faithful to the biblical teaching that has built the character and traditions of this once-Christian nation of UK for many centuries.

There needs to be a clear distinction between free, honest debate with the possibility of offending, shocking or disturbing people and the deliberate "rabble-rousing" that High Court Judge Lord Bracadale eludes to in his Independent Review of Hate Crime in Scotland where 90% of respondents were opposed to new hate crimes.

Yours faithfully

Jessie W Bell
14 July 2020