

April 15, 2020

City of Saskatoon
Governance and Priorities Committee

Re: Conversion Therapy Report and Discussion

Dear Committee Members,

I have reviewed the Conversion Therapy Report prepared by City Administration and I would like to reaffirm the importance of City Council taking action to prevent conversion therapy in Saskatoon via the development of a Conversion Therapy Prohibition Bylaw.

There are now 7 municipalities in Canada with various forms of conversion therapy prohibition bylaws, which include Vancouver, Edmonton, St. Albert, Strathcona County, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Rocky Mountain House, and Spruce Grove. Calgary, Lethbridge, and Saint John, New Brunswick are also at various stages of bylaw development and many other municipalities, towns, and counties are engaged in local conversations about how they can best take action to prohibit conversion therapy from occurring in their respective communities.

With the introduction of Bill C-8 by the Federal Government, some municipalities and provinces may think that further local legislation is redundant or unnecessary. This assumption is incorrect for several reasons.

First, all levels of government have an important role to play when it comes to prohibiting conversion therapy as each has different powers and remedies available. Let me be clear, there is no valid scientific research that supports the efficacy of conversion therapy. Rather, what the research does tell us is that conversion therapy, and so-called sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression change efforts, are fraudulent, deceptive, and dangerous practices that can lead to a life-time of post traumatic stress, self-hatred, internalized homophobia and transphobia, increased self-harming behaviours, suicide ideation, and suicide.

Second, the onset of federal legislation is at least a year or more away, which leaves residents in your community exposed and vulnerable to these dangerous and abusive practices. Also, laying criminal charges represents a much higher burden/threshold than issuing a bylaw infraction ticket. For many vulnerable community members, a local bylaw provides a more direct, accessible, and immediate remedy than criminal charges, which often take years to prosecute.

Third, by developing a local city bylaw Council is being proactive in its beliefs and commitments and can ensure that no city resources (such as facilities or funding) are provided to individuals or groups who practice or promote conversion therapy.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, a local bylaw sends a powerful and direct statement about the kind of community you want to create – one that is open, inclusive and welcoming to all. No one should have to change who they are who they love to find support and acceptance in your community.

In closing, I would strongly urge your Committee to recommend that City Administration develop a comprehensive Conversion Therapy Prohibition Bylaw, which applies to all groups, businesses, and services in your community and protects all individuals from the harms and dangers of conversion therapy.

I would be most pleased to support you and your administration in this important life-saving work.

Sincerely,



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