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█ Cumberland Ave South
Saskatoon, SK
27H █

Re Conversion Therapy Ban discussion at the Governance & Priorities Committee
April 20, 2020

His worship the Mayor Charlie Clark and Members of City Council:

Thank you for following up in a timely manner the request from Grosvenor Park United Church, for the City of Saskatoon to consider banning conversion therapy within its jurisdictional limits.

As I read the Informational report presented by Yeland, City Solicitor, I am delighted to hear that “*The Cities Act* does allow Saskatoon to prohibit a business or class of business from operating in the city” (page 2).

It is the Governance and Priorities Committee, who has the following power of duties delegated to it: the formulation and recommendation to Council of policies, plans, bylaws and other matter that is not covered within the policy area of any other Standing Policy Committee; the conduct of all formal relationships with the Province of Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada.

This is what I am hoping will happen. It would be folly to suggest that people would not try to impose their views and hopes to “make people straight”, despite all evidence that these therapies neither work, nor are they considered credible by the global and Canadian health authorities. However, conversion therapy practices continue to cause acute psychological harm and distress, including suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, self harm, and severe impairment to the health and well-being of its victims.

Moreover, according to a Simon Fraser University Reportⁱ, Dated January 2020, it is clear that Conversion therapy is still common in Canada. And it has social, and medical repercussions. According to the report, produced by MacEwan University, *Conversion Therapy in Canada: The Roles and Responsibilities of Municipalities*ⁱⁱ, when parents tried to change their childrens’ sexual orientation, the attempted suicide rates doubled. These rates tripled when there has been home based pressure along with so called therapists and religious leaders who are homophobic and transphobic (page 8). Without a bylaw to clearly state that these so called therapies, which the Canadian Psychological Association opposes, and defines as “any formal therapeutic attempt to change the sexual orientation of bisexual, gay and lesbian individuals to heterosexual”, adding that this “can include prayer or religious rites, modification of behaviours, and individual or group counselling”, our young and vulnerable folk will not know that this kind of so-called therapy is not effective, healthy nor loving.

We look forward to Municipal bylaws which reflect the diversity, openness and acceptance which we find in Saskatoon. Therefore, municipal bylaws prohibiting conversion therapy are a necessary, critical and important form of civic intervention and support for some of the most vulnerable and exploited citizens in our communities.

While other religious groups may use the argument of freedom of speech or freedom of religion in an attempt to support those who want conversion therapy to continue, in Canada there are reasonable limits to these freedoms that are in the interest of the greater public good. Practicing so-called conversion therapy is an offense to Canadian values and our fundamental belief in the importance of diversity, equity, and human rights. Conversion therapy is a form of psychological torture and hate speech, and Section 319 (3) in the Criminal Code of Canada sets specific defences to the offence of promoting hatred.

In terms of the freedom of religion, a bylaw would protect individuals from having religious beliefs forced on them. Moreover, this bylaw would protect individuals from having others' religious beliefs forced on them by way of coercion, social pressure, manipulation, and threat of ostracization. This is an abuse of the freedom of that individual who must be protected. All forms of support, including prayer, are welcome and encouraged when they focus on supporting and affirming a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Others may also argue that conversion therapy bans puts unnecessary barriers in the way of those who genuinely want to change their lifestyles. However, sexual orientation and gender identity are not "lifestyles" nor can a person's identity be stereotypically reduced to sexual behaviour. Moreover, conversion therapy is ineffective, so being "legally assisted" to change someone to be straight and cis is an illusion, or even customer fraud.

Governments might state that there is no need to prohibit conversion therapy, since it does not acknowledge the modern forms of conversion therapy that are happening outside of the health care system, and are harder to regulate and/or report. Municipalities who agree with conversion therapy prohibition bylaws, see the strong merit in the importance of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of their residents. This is more than a value statement as bylaws provide important tools to let residents know that if they have been subjected to conversion therapy or know of places it is occurring, they can report it and help stop it.

Even if provincial or federal governments choose to enact legislation, it still would be necessary to follow up municipally. The same can be said for municipal bullying bylaws, harassment, anti-discriminatory policies, and other welcoming and inclusive community policies or statements. These are still necessary even if they are also enacted in other levels of governance.

I see our city, the City of Saskatoon, the City of Bridges, as a welcoming, open and progressive City for all people. And I urge this committee to continue our society's well-established legal and ethical obligations to protect people from the foreseeable risks of significant mental, emotional and physical harm by passing bylaws banning conversion therapies, and ensuring the people of Saskatoon that our expectations for safe and ethical business practices are met.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration as you fulfill your duties in the City of Saskatoon.

Warm Regards,

Nobuko Iwai

ⁱ www.sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2020/01study-finds sexual orientation therapy still common in Canada, published January 28, 2020

ⁱⁱ Wells, K (2019). *Conversion therapy in Canada: The roles and responsibilities of municipalities*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University.