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Queer Ontario

Deputation

Bill 77: Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Act

June 3, 2015

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Bill 77: Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Act

Queer Ontario fully supports the proposed *Bill 77: Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Act* as we have been long aware of the disturbing practice of providing so-called ‘conversion therapy’ on Ontarians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgender (LGBT). Such ‘therapy’ has no basis in science and there is much literature that questions and dispels its credibility. The concept of ‘fixing’ or ‘repairing’ one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression is not only an attempt at making heterosexuality and traditional binary notions of gender compulsory, it is a dangerous intervention that will inevitably harm children and youth physically, mentally, psychologically, and socially.

The very existence of ‘conversion or reparative therapies’ with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, implies a form of mental disorder privileging those who are heterosexual and cisgendered. Such implicit assumptions on the part of the health care system pathologizes individuals whose sexual orientation or gender identity and/or expression are located outside of society’s norms and expectations. We are firmly of the belief that one’s sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are not mental disorders, rejecting how the Diagnostic Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders (DSM) has handled these issues in the past (regarding sexual orientation) and currently (regarding trans issues). It is our view that health professionals that engage in such practice are in effect engaging in a discriminatory and harmful practice that is nothing short of unethical.

It is for these reasons that we at Queer Ontario are particularly disturbed by the fact that there are health care professionals in Ontario today who provide such interventions. Even more disturbing is that our tax dollars are being spent on such practices, as members of the medical profession are billing OHIP to carry out such therapy. We urge that the province put an end to such abusive practices.

In 1997 the American Psychological Association (APA) passed a resolution not to engage in ‘conversion or reparative therapies’ with regard to sexual orientation. In January of this year, both the Canadian Association of Social Workers and Canadian Association for Social Work Education released a Joint Statement on the Affirmation of Gender Diverse Children and Youth, in which it declares, “Any professional’s attempt to alter the gender identity or expression of a young person to align with social norms is considered unethical and an abuse of power and authority.”

A queer liberationist perspective promotes the freedom of the individual to embrace the sexual orientation and gender identity that feels most appropriate for them and to have the freedom to express it without fear of prejudice, stigma, discrimination or oppression. We believe health care professionals have an ethical obligation to engage in sound practice that would uphold such principles, and that *Bill 77* can be a tool to ensure ethical, principled, sensitive and respectful treatment of gender and sexually diverse people. To this end we call upon the Government of Ontario to pass *Bill 77*, and to do so quickly, gender and sexually diverse children in the province need this protection.



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We also recommend the following:

- That *Bill 77* makes it explicit that it applies to all health care and social service facilities in the province of Ontario including faith-based facilities
- That all Ontario health and social service professional regulatory bodies (i.e. physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers, etc.) be urged to reflect the contents of *Bill 77* in their respective principles, codes of ethics and standards of practice
- That the accreditation bodies of all Ontario post-secondary educational institutions that provide programs in the health and social service professions be provided with guidelines to assist in including the contents of *Bill 77* in curriculum
- That researchers in the field of health and social services be made aware of *Bill 77* and incorporate its principles in their research ethics
- That all stakeholders in the child welfare system be informed of *Bill 77* and given the necessary resources to work with parents, guardians and families of gender and sexually diverse children and youth in addressing their needs

We thank you for this opportunity to express our support for *Bill 77* and urge its quick passage.

Queer Ontario is a provincial network of gender and sexually diverse individuals — and their allies — who are committed to questioning, challenging, and reforming the laws, institutional practices, and social norms that regulate queer people.