

Dr Hayley Thomas

Email: [REDACTED]

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To whom it may concern

**Re: Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2019**

I am writing to express my concern regarding sections in the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 relating to conversion therapy.

My primary concern is related to Bill's non-specificity and provisions regarding counselling services. I am concerned that if the Bill is passed, it may impede some clients from accessing counselling and therapy that is consistent with their personal beliefs and values. The prohibition against 'suppressing' gender identity seems somewhat nebulous; is this intended to exclude any approach that is not actively gender affirming? If, for example, someone should choose not to actively express their sexual orientation or gender identity due to their personal or religious beliefs, does counselling that supports them in this decision constitute 'encourag[ing the person] to suppress...[their] sexual orientation or gender identity' (section 213F)? If so, this removes what could be an important avenue of support for this group of clients. Even if this is not the intention of the Bill, the significant penalties (which include imprisonment, section 213I) imposed are likely to dissuade health care providers from offering any support that could possibly be interpreted as an offence against the Bill's provisions. This would leave this group of clients in a difficult situation, in which they may be experiencing distress, but unable to access support that is consistent with their beliefs and worldview.

Additionally, I'm concerned that the Bill may discourage adopting a 'watch and wait' approach in children whose gender identity and sexual orientation is still developing. This could result in increased and earlier use of hormonal and other methods for gender transition, which may not be in the best interests of the child in the longer term.

I do not practice professionally in this field and make no claim to have expert knowledge in the area. However, I have significant concern about the Bill for the reasons I have described and ask that you seriously consider these issues and do not recommend the Bill in its current form.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards  
Dr Hayley Thomas  
BSc, MBBS, FRACGP.