



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 7614 Email petitionscommittee@parliament.uk

Website www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State, Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London, SW1A 2NS

12 December 2017

Dear Jeremy,

Response to e-petition 203202: “Make offering gay conversion therapy a criminal offence”

The Petitions Committee met recently and considered a recent e-petition about gay conversion therapy, to which your department has responded. The Committee does not consider your Department’s response to the petition to be satisfactory, and has asked me to write to you.

The petition describes a specific incident in which a journalist (as it happens, the creator of the petition) revealed that a church was offering gay conversion therapy. The response states that the Government is “not aware of the incident referred to in the e-petition”. In fact, this specific incident was raised with a Home Office Minister during topical Questions on 16 October. In any case, it is easy to find a press report of the incident by searching for “church” and “gay conversion”. The Government does not seem to have taken any steps to find out more about this incident.

Moreover, the response does not address directly the request made by the petition. The response explains that the Government does not believe creating a criminal offence is the right way forward, but it does not explain why the Government holds this view. I find this particularly disappointing because, as you may recall, the previous Petitions Committee wrote to the Government about a response to a petition on the same subject. That response had also failed to address this point. In its response to that letter, which I enclose, the

Government was able to provide a clearer answer, so it is difficult to understand why it has not done so in this case.

Finally, the response addresses only action taken by medical professionals. It does not explain what the Government is doing to take action where this kind of therapy is offered by other groups—such as religious groups—who are not covered by the memorandum of understanding and additional training described in the response.

I would therefore be grateful if you could provide us with a response which addresses directly the concerns raised by the petition, no later than Thursday 11 January.

Best Wishes,
Helen.

Helen Jones MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee



Department
of Health

From Jackie Doyle-Price MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Care and Mental Health

Department of Health
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Helen Jones MP
Chair Petitions Committee
House of Commons,
Westminster,
London,
SW1A 0AA

15 January 2018

Dear Helen,

I am writing in response to your letter dated 12 December 2017 about the recent e-petition to criminalise the practice of gay conversion therapy in the UK.

I apologise for the slight delay in my response.

I am sorry that the Petitions Committee considers the Department's response to this petition to be unsatisfactory, and would like to stress that the Government has repeatedly condemned gay conversion therapy. Since the launch of the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion therapy in the UK' in 2015 as part of the Government commitment it has been signed by many health organisations to show unified support for this statement. Additionally, in July 2017, the Church of England's General Synod also backed a motion condemning conversion therapy and supporting the same Memorandum of Understanding.

The Government is committed to eradicating the practice of gay conversion therapy in the UK, but we remain of the view that a blunt legislative tool is not the right vehicle for achieving this goal. Conversion therapy is a broad term for a range of techniques and practices: creating a criminal offence would be challenging at the most fundamental level, as it would be difficult to define holistically. In attempting to define therapy for people dealing with issues related to sexuality there is a real risk that there may be an unintended, negative consequence for valid therapies.

As the Government said in its original reply to this e-petition, and in replies to similar petitions brought forward earlier in 2017, we have no reason to believe the practice of conversion therapy is systematic in the UK. The vast majority of press coverage and of academic evidence on this matter focuses on prevalence in other countries. This is not to underplay the issue: it is one that we take very seriously, and it is an issue that we are keeping under review.

As you are aware, in July 2017 the Government also launched a national LGBT survey to know more about the experiences that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have living in the UK. This survey included questions about whether or not respondents had been offered or undergone conversion therapy, and where that took place.

The Government Equalities Office (GEO) is currently analysing the results of the survey and will publish the findings in 2018. When the analysis is complete, GEO will be working with officials across Government, including the Department of Health and Social Care, to understand the findings and develop responses where necessary.

In response to your specific concerns, I can assure the Committee that while the case was raised in oral questions, it has not been referred to the Department of Health and Social Care. Furthermore, we are unable to comment on criminalising certain activities of those outside of the health profession as this responsibility rests elsewhere in Government.

Your request for a fuller reasoning behind our preference for a non-criminal approach is well-noted and I hope that this further response provides a clearer and more direct response to the petition, and reassures you of the Government's commitment to ensuring that gay conversion therapy is not practised in the UK.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jackie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

JACKIE DOYLE-PRICE



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 7614 Email petitionscommittee@parliament.uk
Website www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee

Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP
Leader of the House
House of Commons

24 January 2017

Dear Andrea,

E-petition 203202—“Make offering gay conversion therapy a criminal offence”

I am writing to ask for your assistance in obtaining a satisfactory response to this petition.

I enclose the exchange of correspondence we have had so far with the Minister, together with the original Government response.

You will see from this that the Committee was not satisfied with the original response. In particular:

- the response did not adequately explain why the Government believed that creating a new criminal offence was not the right way forward.
- the response only described work that the Government is doing with medical professionals. It did not explain what the Government is doing when this “therapy” is offered by people who aren’t medical professionals, as in the case described in the petition.
- the response said that the Government was not aware of a specific case mentioned in the petition, when in fact the case had been raised with a Minister during Topical Questions. In any case, it could easily be found online.

The Minister’s response of 15 January provides only a partial answer to the Committee’s concerns. The Minister explains that this is because responsibility lies “elsewhere in Government”. The Committee does not consider this to be an acceptable reason for a petition receiving an inadequate response.

As you will know, it is for the Government—not a single department—to provide a response to petitions. Where a petition raises an issue that crosses departmental lines, it may be necessary for more than one department to contribute to the response. That is a matter for the Government to resolve. The Committee is concerned only with ensuring that all petitions receive a response which clearly and directly addresses the request they have made.

I would be very grateful if you could work with your Ministerial colleagues to ensure that the Committee receives a satisfactory response to this petition.

I will also be drawing this matter to the attention of Rt Hon Maria Miller, as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, since it reveals a worrying lack of co-ordination across government on this important issue.

Best Wishes,

Helen.

Helen Jones MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee

Cc: Jackie Doyle-Price, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Care and Mental Health

Encs: Letter from Jackie Doyle-Price, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Care and Mental Health to the Chair of the Petitions Committee, 15 January 2018

Letter from the Chair of the Petitions Committee to the Secretary of State for Health, 12 December 2017

Government response to e-petition 203202



Office of the Leader
of the House of Commons

70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

Tel: 020 7276 1005
commonsleader@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Our Ref: AL/MP061

28 February 2018

Dear Helen

Department of Health and Social Care response to E-Petition 203202

Thank you for your letter of 24 January regarding the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) response to the E-Petition 'Make offering Gay conversion therapy a criminal offence'.

I understand the Committee's concerns regarding the Department's response to this E-Petition and as the Leader of the House of Commons I am committed to ensuring that the Government provides adequate and substantive responses to E-Petitions across the board. There have been discussions at official level between my office and the DHSC and I understand from the Department that the particularly complex and cross sector nature of this issue meant that it was difficult to provide a response that met the expectations of the Committee.

The DHSC and the Government Equalities Office (GEO) are keen to assure both the Committee and the signatories of the E-Petition that the Government is committed to tackling the issue of gay conversion therapy and will continue to look at ways in which they can change the dialogue around LGBT issues and to prevent practices as described in this E-Petition.

The DHSC has explained that the Government Equalities Office (GEO) are currently analysing the results from a recent survey on LGBT related issues including gay conversion therapy. Once this analysis has been concluded, they will be in a better position to determine how broad the issue is and what kind of action, whether legislative or regulatory, will be necessary. I have asked that the GEO provide an update to the Committee on the outcome of this important work as soon as they are able to do so.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or issues that you would like to raise with me.

Best
Andrea

**RT HON ANDREA LEADSOM MP
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS**



Department
of Health

*From Jackie Doyle-Price MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Inequalities*

*Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

Helen Jones MP
Chair Petitions Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Helen,

I am writing in response to your further letter about the Government response to the e-petition calling for the criminalisation of the practice of gay conversion therapy in the UK.

I am sorry that the Committee was not satisfied with the previous letter and I would like to assure you that we share a determination to make progress on eradicating the practice of gay conversion therapy.

Homosexuality is not something to be cured, nonetheless, for any criminal offence it is very important that the offence is clearly defined. In our view there is a real risk that in seeking to define conversion therapy there may be an unintended, negative consequence for valid therapies. Individuals may wish to seek counselling on issues of sexuality that they may be struggling with personally, and we feel that the Government has a duty of care to protect this right.

However, please be assured the Government is keeping the issue of conversion therapy under close review.

I trust you will appreciate that a strong evidence base is essential to developing a robust response to this issue. As you are aware, in order to improve the available evidence base, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) included questions on conversion therapy in the national LGBT survey, which it launched in 2017. The survey received more than 100,000 responses, making it one of the largest surveys of LGBT people's experiences ever conducted. The questions relating to conversion therapy focused on:

- whether respondents to the survey had been offered or undergone conversion therapy

- if they had, who offered or conducted the therapies – options included parents, guardians or family members, faith organisations or groups, healthcare providers or medical professionals, other persons from within their community, or any other organisations or individuals not listed

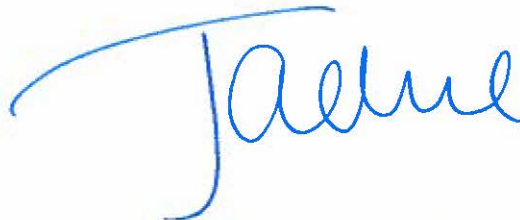
The GEO is currently analysing the results and will be publishing the Government's response later this year that will consider all policy responses.

While the survey was open to anyone and therefore cannot be described as representative of the breadth of the population, due to the large number of responses to the survey overall I believe this data will offer a clearer view of the scale and significance of conversion therapy in the UK than previously available.

As part of the response to the survey, GEO will be investigating what steps the Government as a whole could take – in addition to the existing work Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has undertaken – and working with relevant departments to end this practice.

I recognise the damage that conversion therapy can cause and the DHSC is committed to working with GEO to explore how we can end this practice in the UK.

I hope that this response answers the specific questions you felt were not previously addressed.



JACKIE DOYLE-PRICE