

Presentation to Regina City Council in Support of Bylaw No. 2021-51 to Ban Conversion Therapy

Good [morning/evening] and thank you to Regina City Council and the clerks for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Nicholas Schiavo and I am the founder of No Conversion Canada - a national, nonpartisan, grassroots organization and registered nonprofit dedicated to ending conversion “therapy”/conversion practices here in Canada. No Conversion Canada works directly with conversion “therapy” survivors, the LGBTQ2+ community, civil society organizations, medical professionals, academics and policymakers to raise awareness about conversion therapy in Canada, develop comprehensive legislation to outlaw this abuse at all levels of government and develop fulsome survivor supports to foster healing.

No Conversion Canada has made formal submissions to several municipalities across Canada on this issue, including the Regina Community Wellness Committee, and has testified before the House of Commons on federal legislative efforts, namely, Bill C-6.

I would like to begin by stating that as a national organization, our work reflects many individuals, organizations and communities from coast to coast. We have a lot of experience working with survivors, local activists and civil society and presenting to City Councils, like we are today. That being said, should Regina City Council feel it is important to weigh local voices more prominently in this vote, we welcome you to do so. In our experience, municipal decisions on conversion therapy bring out well-organized and well-funded opposition which use vast networks to fear-monger, intimidate and spread misinformation. This process tends to be quite ugly and often leads to the re-traumatization of survivors, making it that much harder to advocate for safety. I would ask that you please listen to your community - in particular survivors and local LGBTQ2 individuals in making the right decision that will keep this community safe.

With that being said, on behalf of No Conversion Canada, I am speaking to you to voice our full support for municipal action to ban conversion therapy in Regina and urge you to vote in favour of the Prohibited Businesses Bylaw to help end this abuse and protect LGBTQ2+ residents as soon as possible.

Conversion therapy is not a “therapy” at all, but **fraudulent, deceptive, and unscientific practices that attempt to change, deny or suppress an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. It is known to cause significant harm to vulnerable people with life-long effects.** Conversion therapy practices go by many different names such as reparative therapy, ex-gay therapy, gay cure, reducing unwanted same-sex attraction and “sexual orientation and gender identity and expression change efforts” (SOGIECE).

Today, despite the overwhelming consensus of medical and health professionals, conversion therapy is still widely endorsed by some faith leaders, cultural and religious communities and families under different guises. According to [data](#) from June 2021, **as many as one in ten (10%) gay, bi, trans, and queer men and Two-Spirit and non-binary Canadians have experienced conversion practices.** Of particular concern, the data finds that that **72% started conversion therapy before the age of 20.**

Conversion therapy has been widely denounced as a deceptive, dangerous, and harmful practice by dozens of major medical, health, and human rights organizations around the world including the United Nations, World Health Organization, World Psychiatric Association, Pan American Health Organization, Canadian Psychological Association, Canadian Psychiatric Association, Canadian Paediatric Society, Canadian Association of Social Workers, Human Rights Campaign and Amnesty International, to name a few.

Conversion therapy is a complex and nuanced enemy which requires a comprehensive response. While there is no “silver bullet” to ending conversion therapy, a layered approach – which includes grassroots, municipal, provincial/territorial, federal and international action – is shown to have the greatest impact in protecting the safety and freedom of LGBTQ2+ people. In short, municipal bylaws help save lives.

Municipal bylaws can institute governance policies that revoke business licenses or restrict the use of county grants, funding, facilities, donations, or other contributions to organizations that currently commit or promote conversion therapy. They can also levy large fines directly on businesses or organizations shown to be committing conversion therapy.

It's important to note that conversion therapy bylaws and legislation are commonplace in Canada and have existed in communities from coast to coast, for years. Provinces and territories that already have, or are in the process of developing their own legislation include the Yukon, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI. We have seen communities across Canada take this issue up directly by introducing municipal bans through bylaws and policies. These include the communities of Vancouver, Wood Buffalo, St. Albert, Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Beaumont, Strathcona County, Rocky Mountain House, Calgary, Strathmore, Lethbridge, Saskatoon, Montreal, Kingston and Saint John.

Municipal bylaws to ban conversion therapy are essential for a number of reasons:

- 1) They can provide an immediate, local resource to individuals who are being subjected to conversion therapy
- 2) They can help end this form of torture where provincial/territorial governments may be unwilling to do so. Please note, there is no provincial conversion therapy legislation in Saskatchewan.
- 3) Municipalities are best equipped for service delivery which is important as survivors may need help in contacting authorities, finding housing or accessing local mental health resources.
- 4) By revoking business licenses or levying heavy fines to stop organizations who commit conversion therapy, cities can have a wider impact in shutting down systemic perpetrators of conversion therapy and can often be quicker and less expensive than starting a criminal case.
- 5) Municipal governments can also take a proactive approach and provide funding or space in the community for local LGBTQ2+ groups and organizations to support survivors and the wider community at large.

Most importantly, **legislation at the local level to prohibit conversion therapy sends a powerful and direct message 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 or who they love to find support and acceptance in your community.

While there are many individuals and organizations who will use misinformation and fearmongering to attack these life-saving protections, we ask you to **please be brave in**

doing what's right and standing up for the safety of the most vulnerable in our communities. We welcome the opportunity to work with any policymaker who is interested in standing up to this barbaric abuse, and we look forward to ongoing engagement with the City of Regina. Thank you for taking action on this important issue.

Nicholas Schiavo
Founder, No Conversion Canada

Additional Resources for Councillors

(For reference, will not be presented)

- [**Experiences With Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Conversion Therapy Practices Among Sexual Minority Men in Canada, 2019–2020**](#) (Dr. Travis Salway, Simon Fraser University, et al. June 2021)
- [**Geographic Distribution of Conversion Therapy in Canada**](#) (Amrit Tiwana, Simon Fraser University, April 2021)
- [**Corriger Nos Pratiques : Les Approches Thérapeutiques Pour Intervenir Auprès Des Enfants Trans Examinées Dans Une Perspective Juridique**](#) (Florence Ashley, University of Toronto, 2021)
- [**Conversion Therapy In Canada: A Guide For Legislative Action**](#) (Dr. Kristopher Wells, MacEwan University, et al. October 2020)
- [**Ending Conversion Therapy in Canada: Survivors, Community Leaders, Researchers, and Allies Address the Current and Future States of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression Change Efforts**](#) (Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity et al. February 2020)