**Courage Ministry**

 **Article 114: January – March 2020**

 **Brendan Scarce**

**An Observer at the Enquiry into the Queensland Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 - Parliamentary Hearing – 6th February 2020**

**Introduction:**

I first became aware in November 2018 of a move to ban in Queensland what is wrongly called “Conversion” therapy. The correct clinical name is Reparative Therapy.

An ALP member asked for my support in a poll in which she was a participant. She indicated among other things that she wanted me to vote for her action in banning Conversion Therapy. I questioned why the QLD ALP which allegedly supports free speech and international human rights would want to negative a person’s conscientious belief and action. I also asked why would a Queensland Government spend so much time, resources and energy legislating on a very rare counselling item which is rarely practiced in Queensland. In spite of my response I received another note a fortnight later informing me that thousands of LGBTI people have suicided because of Conversion Therapy. I again responded as respectfully as I could to assert that I don’t believe that statistic and I asked if it was an American statistic. She did not respond.

**One year later:**

In late November 2019 the Queensland Parliament passed a Bill which in Part 5 section 22 legislated to ban Conversion Therapy. When I was alerted to this Bill in December and public submissions were invited I knew that I ought to respond. I submitted my proposal and it was numbered 67 in the list of public submissions. Unfortunately because I had mentioned in my submission two ALP Members of Parliament that I had sent a copy of my submission, the committee had excluded my submission from public viewing listing it as confidential. I had stated among other matters, that I was concerned with the implications of the Bill and its unintended consequences for Counsellors.

**Attendance at Public Hearing**

I attended the Public Hearing on Friday 6th February and heard all the public witnesses and their arguments and reasons for either supporting or rejecting the Bill. The Panel members consisted of three ALP members, one LNP member and one Green member. The panel was well prepared. Each panel member had the public submissions in front of them and were able to enquire logically and intelligently as they queried the public witnesses/speakers/groups

There were 28 witnesses from 14 organizations/bodies/ groups and in total 22 spoke. Two of the witnesses represented United Voice and the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council. These two organization were concerned about other parts of the Bill, but not Part 5 which called for the banning of Conversion Therapy.

Each introductory speaker was allowed a ten minute opening statement. As I expected the diversity of opinion about the Bill was enormous. In the main the speakers for LGBTI and the formerly named AIDS Council called for Conversion Therapy to be criminalised. The five psychiatrists from the AMA, and RANZCP stated among other things that the Bill was draconian, dangerous and ambiguous. It was stated that The Bill focuses on clinical practice not religious or pastoral practice as operating in Church or religious groups.

**The three psychiatrists from the AMA** questioned the lack of clarity of the term Conversion Therapy and explained that the definition within the Bill was simplistic. Dr. Peter Parry, a child and adolescent psychiatrist for 30 years asserted that he had never seen any person who had undergone Conversion Therapy. He further stated that Conversion Therapy is different to Gender Dysphoria. Dr. Dilip Dhupelia said that Conversion Therapy should not be under the Criminal Code but under the Regulatory Bodies of APRA, RANZP or AMA. Dr. Cary Breakey supported this by confirming that the AMA already has regulations to cover practices that are not approved.

**The Human Rights Deputy Commissioner, Neroli Holmes,** stated that in the prohibiting of Conversion Therapy there is the issue of balancing competing rights and appropriate remedies need to be thoroughly detailed. And In her answer to a question from Mr Berkman (Greens MP), she said she is quoting USA statistics given there is an absence of evidence within Australia. She would be surprised if much Conversion Therapy is occurring in Australia. To which Mark McArdle(LNP MP), stated that there is actually no evidence of its practice in Australia. Sean Costello, the Human Rights Principal Lawyer, quoted a Latrobe Study that one Brisbane Group was offering Conversion Therapy. But again the evidence seemed to be anecdotal and not epidemiological. The Latrobe report was rejected by the medical and academic witnesses.

**Professor Patrick Parkinson -Teleconference** stated boldly that the Bill would drive away clinicians and expert practitioners. A fact that Professor John Whitehall, a paediatrician who in his experience as a well established expert stated that 28 paediatricians with 931 years experience affirmed that they do not believe in the transgender process. Parkinson emphatically asserted that we must not do wrong and he believed that the influence of social media leads to a social contagion of peer pressure. He quoted research evidence that 80 – 85% of children resolve the issue of sexuality during puberty. Helena from the International Women’s Day (IWD) Association, (Brisbane Meanjin) said that sexual orientation does not stabilize much before nineteen years and one girl of 25 who undertook treatment now realizes she has made a mistake. Her colleague, Anna said that affirmation therapy is really conversion therapy.

**Dr. Philip Morris from the National Association of Practising Psychiatrists** did not hold back in his opening address. He made a lot of strong assertions the main being that sex is determined at birth, there is no studies of Conversion Therapy in Australia. It is unlikely that Queensland Health Services would do the treatment in Queensland. The legislation is draconian and it is a way of criminalizing a regular medical practice and it is crazy that the Queensland Government is legislating this.

**Professor Dianna Kenny – a Psychologist with over twenty years practice** The Professor of Psychology stated that the Bill was deceitful in the way it links the LGBTI with Gender Identity and that the Bill had many human rights violations. She indicated that Gender Dysphoria was highly promoted in the Bill. In answer to the question put to her by the Chair of the panel Aaron Harper (ALP MP), what are the human rights, Professor Kenny stated systematically:

Parents have been denied parental rights; the Bill begins with social contagion -social media -peer pressure; parents have been charged with child abuse for not calling their child by his/her sex change name; puberty blockers are used and there is a 35% infection rate in surgery.

**Professor Whitehall a paediatrician the last speaker as a witness**  was quite concerned about chemical blockers because once used they have an irreversible impact on the brain. He stated that if you mess with the brain – one cannot develop properly. He said puberty blockers neuter children and causes structural change in the brain. He further called this “chemical castration” and stated that blockers are a lifelong intrusion into the life of a person. Other speaker/witnesses also referred to the term “surgical castration.” Professor Whitehall opined that it was a manipulative claim by the Gender Dysphoria-Transgender group that the treatment does not lead to suicide. He asserted that there is a 20-30% higher rate of suicide in transgendered people. He concluded by stating “You guys have been lead up the garden path. You are immersing yourself into criminalizing action.”

**Why did I spend most of the day at this Hearing?**

I went along to the Public hearing because of my submission pleading that any person seeking “Conversion” (Reparative) Therapy has a right to be heard and free to seek this. I indicated that I was neutral in my support of this therapy, but I wondered why a person could seek a sex change and another person be denied the option of Reparative Therapy.

See my comments in the Introduction where I wondered why the Queensland Government wanted to outlaw what it calls Conversion Therapy. It seems to be the LGBTI group and its supporters who demanded legislative action.

I felt that Mark McArdle, made a very significant contribution by the panel when he stated that he had not heard evidence that day for a criminal offence to be given for the practice of Conversion Therapy. He very acutely pondered why if we decriminalized abortion in 2019 why in 2020 would we criminalize Conversion Therapy. He had heard no reason for criminalizing it.

The psychiatrists and the three professorial witnesses as well as the International Women’s Day group stated that the term as drafted in the Bill is ambiguous, unclear, simplistic and even dangerous. I too oppose the Bill.

**Conclusion**

As the Director of Brisbane Courage I thought it would be useful for Courage members and supporters to know about the broader perspective of issues affecting same-sex attracted people in our State.

My scriptural inspiration and prayer for this article is Ecclesiasticus 4:23(28) “Do not refrain from speaking at the opportune time and do not hide your wisdom.”

Brisbane Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane

Director: Brendan Scarce – brisbanecourage@bigpond.com Mob 0432 148 025