

Assisted suicide: *the onslaught continues*

Review by **Mark Pickering**
CMF Chief Executive

In recent months there has been continual pressure to legalise assisted suicide all around the British Isles. In Westminster, Baroness Meacher's bill had its second reading in October, with an excellent seven-hour debate; it is unlikely to progress beyond Committee stage. However, an amendment by Lord Forsyth to the Government's Health & Care Bill would, if passed, mandate the Government to bring forth its own 'assisted dying' bill within a year. This is a highly irregular misuse of parliamentary protocol and reflects campaigners' frustrations at their lack of concrete success despite continual lobbying. Meanwhile, Baroness Finlay's tireless campaigning on palliative care received a fantastic boost in February, when the Government adopted her amendment to the Health and Care Bill. This would result in universal commissioning of palliative care

within the English NHS and should help to reduce difficult deaths.¹ Dignity in Dying (DiD) continue to press their mantra of 'terminally ill, mentally competent adults with six months to live'. However, *all* the other campaign groups in the British Isles (at least six) want to go further. DiD's narrow campaign is simply a pragmatic attempt to get a foot in the door; others would then push it wider.² In Scotland, Liam McArthur's public consultation received over 10,000 responses; we await analysis of these and further indications of his draft bill. In Jersey, the Citizens' Jury led to the States Assembly approving the principle of 'assisted dying' legislation in November.³ We expect to see draft legislation later this year, after elections in Jersey. In Dublin, although the Dying with Dignity Bill was rejected last year, a special

committee will soon examine 'assisted dying' proposals in more detail.⁴ CMF continues to work through our partner organisations to promote good palliative care and to highlight the dangers of 'assisted dying' legislation. Please consider signing up to Our Duty of Care to receive regular updates on how you can help. ourdutyofcare.org.uk

references (accessed 8/3/2022)

1. Govt backs right to end-of-life care for all. *The Christian Institute*. 2 March 2022. bit.ly/3sSaB4L
2. Our Campaign - What We Want. *My Death, My Decision*. bit.ly/3sSfb2Y
3. Jersey approves principle of legalising assisted dying. *BBC News Online*. bbc.in/3pQ1T5f
4. Joint Committee on Justice recommends Special Oireachtas Committee examines topic of assisted dying following scrutiny of Dying with Dignity Bill 2020. *Houses of the Oireachtas*. 21 Jul 2021. bit.ly/3sSlgfv

Concerning news from Scotland: *the 'Conversion Therapy' ban*

Review by **Jennie Pollock**
CMF Head of Public Policy

Last year the Scottish parliament ran a consultation¹ seeking views on how they should respond to a petition 'Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban the provision or promotion of LGBT+ conversion therapy in Scotland'.² Later in the year, Westminster also launched a consultation on the topic. CMF responded to both consultations.³ We and many of our partner organisations pointed out that both consultations lacked any definition of the term 'conversion therapy', but made the assumption that anything coming under this banner is inherently harmful. For example, the Westminster consultation began by saying: 'The Government will ban conversion therapy. There is no justification for these coercive and abhorrent practices'.⁴ The consultations also offered little reassurance for counsellors, medical practitioners, or church leaders that their normal work of supporting people to explore questions of sexuality and gender would be protected. The glimmer of light in this is that CMF and other Christian organisations weren't the only ones highlighting these problems.

Most notable was the response by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the first of several high-profile organisations to leave LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall's 'Diversity Champions' scheme last year.^{5,6,7} The EHRC raised many of the same concerns as we did, and noted: 'The legislation must be carefully drafted in order not to catch legitimate and appropriate counselling, therapy or support which enables a person to explore their sexual orientation or gender dysphoria, and to avoid criminalising mainstream religious practice such as preaching, teaching and praying about sexual ethics.'⁸ While the Government Equalities Office in England has appeared to listen carefully to our concerns, in Scotland, the situation looks much more serious. Holyrood will shortly debate a report produced by the Equalities Committee presenting its findings following the consultation.⁹ That report calls for a 'fully comprehensive' ban, covering 'sexual orientation and gender identity, including trans identities, for both adults and children in all settings without exception and include "consensual" conversion practices.' It commends the legislation in Victoria, Australia¹⁰ – the most far-reaching in the

world to date – as 'one of the best practice examples'. This is of deep concern. We are working with partner organisations to ask MSPs to ensure that any bill targets only genuinely harmful practices and provides for parents, pastors, and healthcare professionals to operate in line with orthodox Christian teaching on these issues.

references (accessed 4/3/2022)

1. Views on the 'End Conversion Therapy' petition. *The Scottish Parliament*. 13 August 2021. bit.ly/3IKZlwx
2. PE1817: End Conversion Therapy. *The Scottish Parliament*. 13 August 2020. bit.ly/35nhjD
3. cmf.org.uk/advocacy/submissions
4. Banning Conversion Therapy Government Consultation. 29 October 2021. p. 12. bit.ly/3ScY6Ki
5. McManus J. Human rights body leaves Stonewall diversity scheme. *BBC News*. 23 May 2021. bbc.in/3hEDxXu
6. Tobin S. Ofcom is latest to leave Stonewall's Diversity Champions workplace scheme. *The Times*. 26 August 2021. bit.ly/3sGeSlr
7. Andersson J. BBC quits Stonewall's Diversity Champions scheme over impartiality concerns. *iNews*. 10 November 2021. bit.ly/3sEWzDj
8. Banning conversion therapy: Response submitted to UK Government consultation. *Equality and Human Rights Commission*. January 2022. bit.ly/34gf7Ra
9. Report on Petition PE1817: End Conversion Therapy. *The Scottish Parliament*. 25 January 2022. bit.ly/3slsdjG
10. Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. *Victorian Legislation*. 16 February 2021. bit.ly/35OqqXI