

## Submission to the Victorian Law Reform Commission

### Focused Review of How the Change or Suppression Practices Ban Is Working

Please note that submissions must be relevant. We only review the matters detailed in the terms of reference. We recommend using the consultation paper and these questions to help guide your submission.

We will publish public submissions on our website, unless they are offensive, defamatory, or outside the scope of the review.

We will not publish the names of individuals who make a submission. We will also redact any information which may indirectly identify individuals.

The consultation paper relates to change or suppression practices, which can cause ongoing trauma and long-term health issues. If you need counselling or help you can get support by contacting the organisations on our [support page](#) or page 3 of the consultation paper.



**Please provide your comments on the questions below. You may answer all or only some of the questions as relevant to you.**

- 1. Has the Act reduced or stopped change or suppression practices? Describe any impact you think the Act has had on the occurrence or the nature of change or suppression practices.**

As a survivor of change or suppression practices, I do believe the Act has led to some change. However, that change appears to be largely superficial- affecting how these practices are presented and how visible they are, rather than stopping them altogether. In my experience, these practices have become more concealed and less openly discussed, rather than eliminated.

When I reported my own experiences to Victoria Police- including corrective rape, a forced exorcism, being told I deserved to be stoned to death for being queer, and being subjected to 'scriptural counselling'- I was told that these did not constitute change or suppression practices under the Act. That response was not only deeply distressing, but it also highlighted a serious gap in understanding of both the legislation and the lived reality of these harms.

In my view, this lack of understanding and application by Victoria Police undermines the effectiveness of the Act. When those responsible for enforcing the law do not recognise clear breaches, it sends a message, intentionally or not, that there are unlikely to be consequences. As a result, individuals and groups engaging in these practices may feel emboldened to continue, knowing that accountability is uncertain or absent.

- 2. To what extent do you think the community is aware of and understands:**
  - a. the Act and how it works**
  - b. what change or suppression practices are**
  - c. the harm caused by change or suppression practices.**

In my own experience, I have encountered a concerning lack of understanding even among professionals. A family violence case worker, who was aware of my history, told me -unprompted- that change or suppression practices do not really occur anymore, and suggested that homophobia is, in some way, the fault of queer people for being “too visible.” That kind of response is not only inaccurate, but deeply harmful, and reflects a broader gap in awareness.

I have also observed that within some parts of the religious community, there is significant fear and misinformation about the Act. In particular, some believe it could lead to the Bible being banned or restricted due to interpretations of certain passages. This reflects a misunderstanding of the purpose of the legislation, which does not seek to limit religious belief, but to prevent practices that cause demonstrable harm.

At the same time, aspects of my own experiences have been minimised or dismissed as “not that bad” or “not really conversion therapy,” simply because they do not fit the narrow, often sensationalised narratives seen in the media. There is a widespread lack of understanding about what change or suppression practices can actually look like- especially in fundamentalist religious contexts, where they are often framed as care, guidance, or concern for someone’s soul. Based on these experiences, I do not believe there is a strong or consistent community understanding of what these practices are, how harmful they can be, or how the Act is intended to operate.

- 3. Could the Act's operation and effectiveness be improved? If so, how?**

The Act's operation and effectiveness could be significantly improved through comprehensive, mandatory training for Victoria Police.

I was told by Victoria Police that practices I was subjected to such as exorcisms, corrective rape, and informal scriptural counselling do not constitute change or suppression practices.

This was despite the perpetrator admitting to 'scriptural counselling', however, Victoria Police stated that because it was not in a formalised setting with a registered mental health professional they viewed it as a conversation and not CSP, and thus not an offence under the Act.

I strongly urge specialised training for Victoria Police on what constitutes CSP under the Act, as well as training on how to respond to and interact with survivors in a trauma-informed manner. I also believe services such as family violence services, teachers etc need to be educated on how to identify CSP, and next steps to take if they believe someone has experienced, or is experiencing, CSP.



**7. How effective are VEOHRC's awareness and education materials on change or suppression practices? What improvements, if any, could help strengthen community understanding and compliance?**

I see the VEOHRC's awareness and education materials as a good starting point, but not one that is currently effective enough in practice. The materials themselves may be clear, but they are not reaching or being understood by the people who need them most. In my experience there is still a significant lack of understanding among frontline responders about what actually constitutes these practices or how serious the harm is. This isn't just a gap in awareness- it has real consequences, where survivors like me are dismissed, minimised, or left without support.

A major issue is that many people still associate conversion practices only with extreme or formalised interventions, and don't recognise the more common, insidious forms like ongoing spiritual pressure, informal "counselling," or coercion within families and religious communities. From a survivor perspective, this makes the materials feel disconnected from reality. It becomes even more complicated in fundamentalist religious environments, where education alone often has limited impact. In those spaces, people may genuinely believe they are required to follow their interpretation of the Bible above all else- even if that means breaking the law. Harmful practices are reframed as acts of love or salvation, which makes external guidance easy to dismiss and allows these behaviours to continue largely unchecked.

To strengthen community understanding and compliance, there needs to be far more targeted, mandatory education grounded in survivor experience and real-world examples. At the same time, responses must account for the reality that some communities will not shift through information alone. This means investing in approaches that go beyond awareness such as stronger enforcement, informed engagement strategies, and survivor-led interventions that can challenge harmful narratives from within. Without that, the gap between what the law says and what happens in practice will continue to leave victims unprotected.

**8. Are there any barriers to:**

- a. reporting change or suppression practices to VEOHRC**
- b. VEOHRC facilitating outcomes of reports**
- c. VEOHRC conducting investigations.**

**If so, please describe what those barriers are.**

As a survivor of change or suppression practices, I believe there are significant and compounding barriers at every stage- reporting, facilitating outcomes, and conducting investigations.

When survivors come forward, there are serious barriers to VEOHRC facilitating outcomes. Based on my experience, there is a lack of clarity and consistency in how reports are handled, which can be retraumatising. Survivors may feel unsupported, dismissed, or left without meaningful follow-up. This is compounded by a broader lack of understanding among professionals, including frontline responders, about what constitutes change or suppression practices. When survivors have already had their experiences minimised by services such as police or family violence workers, it reduces confidence in engaging further with formal systems.

There are also significant challenges for VEOHRC in conducting investigations. These practices often occur in private, informal, and ongoing context within families or closed religious communities where there is little external evidence and strong internal pressure to conceal what is happening. Perpetrators may genuinely believe their actions are justified or divinely mandated, and therefore do not view themselves as doing anything wrong. This makes both detection and accountability more difficult. Without stronger training for frontline professionals, clearer processes, and a more survivor-informed approach, these barriers will continue to limit the effectiveness of the Act and leave many survivors without access to justice or support.

**9. Are there changes that could help support VEOHRC to carry out its functions or improve the effectiveness of the civil response scheme? If so, please describe any changes.**

I believe VEOHRC should be better empowered to play an active role in matters involving CSP. This could include strengthening its statutory powers to allow it to provide expert advice, make representations, or be formally involved in investigations and proceedings where these practices are identified. Given the complexity of CSP, there is a clear need for specialised expertise to guide decision-making and ensure the intent of the Act is upheld in practice.

The civil response scheme itself needs to be more accessible, trauma informed, and survivor-centred. Processes should be clearly explained, communication should be consistent, and survivors should be supported throughout in a way that minimises retraumatisation. There should also be stronger links between reporting and tangible outcomes, so that survivors can see that their experiences are taken seriously. Without these changes, the system risks feeling difficult to navigate and ultimately ineffective, which discourages reporting and limits the Act's impact.

**10. Are there barriers to reporting, investigating and prosecuting criminal change or suppression offences? If so, what are they?**

I believe a key barrier to the effective operation of the Act is the inability of Victoria Police to recognise and pursue criminal charges in relation to these practices. In my own case, I reported experiences including corrective rape, a forced exorcism, being told I deserved to be killed for being queer, and being subjected to 'scriptural counselling' (which was admitted by the perpetrator but not recognised as CSP because the perpetrator was not a mental health professional and the counselling was not formal). Despite the severity of these acts, I was told by Victoria Police that they did not constitute change or suppression practices under the Act. I was also told they did not really know how to apply the legislation, and although I provided contact details for an expert, this was not followed up.

My experience was that there was little interest in pursuing criminal charges under the Act, and that the matter was effectively treated as too complex or difficult. This points to a serious gap in training and confidence, where police are not equipped to identify criminal breaches of the legislation, particularly when they occur in religious or high-control settings. When even extreme examples are not recognised as potential offences, it creates a situation where the criminal provisions of the Act are not being meaningfully used.

To address this, there must be mandatory, specialised training for Victoria Police focused specifically on identifying when change or suppression practices meet the threshold for criminal offences. This training must be survivor-led and grounded in real-world examples, so that officers can recognise these practices beyond narrow or stereotypical definitions. Without this, the criminal aspects of the Act risk remaining largely unenforced, and those responsible for serious harm will continue to operate without fear of legal consequences.

**11. Are there other aspects of the criminal offences in the Act that limit their effective operation? If so, what changes or supports could improve their operation?**

**12. Do existing avenues for redress adequately meet the needs of victim-survivors of change or suppression practices? Are there gaps, harms or barriers that require an additional or separate redress mechanism?**

Existing avenues for redress do not adequately meet the needs of victim-survivors of change or suppression practices.

I believe the development of a more comprehensive, survivor-centred redress framework that includes access to funded psychological care, including long-term therapy where required would be incredibly helpful. This could take the form of a dedicated compensation or support scheme that recognises the unique and ongoing nature of harm caused by conversion practices.

I would like to note that technically survivors of certain criminal CSP practices should be able to access the Victims of Crime Financial Assistance Scheme, if acts are not being recognised as criminal as with my experience, this remains impossible.

**13. Should a civil cause of action be introduced under the Act? What distinct purpose would it serve compared to existing pathways?**

Yes, a civil cause of action should be introduced under the Act. As a survivor of change or suppression practices, I believe this would provide a critical alternative pathway for accountability, particularly in situations where criminal charges are not pursued or are not successful. In my own experience, even when reporting serious harm, there was a lack of understanding and willingness to apply the criminal aspects of the Act. A civil pathway would allow survivors to seek recognition and justice without relying solely on systems that may not yet be equipped to respond effectively.

A civil cause of action would serve a distinct purpose by lowering the threshold for action and giving survivors greater agency. It would enable individuals to pursue accountability directly, rather than depending entirely on police to investigate and prosecute. This is especially important given that many change or suppression practices occur in private, ongoing, and coercive contexts, where evidence can be difficult to gather and criminal cases may not proceed. A civil pathway would also allow for a broader recognition of harm, including psychological, emotional, and social impacts that may not always be fully captured in criminal proceedings.

Importantly, a civil mechanism could provide access to compensation and support for recovery, including funding for long-term, trauma-informed psychological care. For many survivors, the harm caused by these practices is complex and ongoing, and current pathways do not adequately address this. A civil cause of action would help fill the gap between no action and criminal prosecution, offering both accountability and tangible support, while also reinforcing that these practices are not only unlawful, but deeply harmful.

