

To: Victorian Law Reform Commission

Subject: Submission regarding the Focused Review of the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021*

24 March 2026

Introduction

I am writing to you as a pastor and minister of religion serving a community in Victoria. I am deeply committed to the well-being and dignity of every person I minister to. While I support the protection of individuals from coercive or abusive "therapies," I am profoundly concerned about the immediate and long-term impacts of the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021*. Specifically, I am concerned that the Act's current framing criminalises compassionate, evidence-based pastoral care and prevents individuals from seeking religious support that aligns with their own deeply held faith convictions and biological realities.

The "Chilling Effect" on Pastoral Care

The primary issue with the Act is its broad and ambiguous definition of "suppression." This has created a pervasive "chilling effect" across faith communities. As a minister, I find that the current legal definitions do not clearly distinguish between coercion and consensual spiritual support.

I have observed a growing hesitation among clergy to offer traditional comfort or scriptural guidance to those in distress. When a law is so broad that it makes a minister fear the consequences of praying with a person for self-discipline—at that person's own request—it moves beyond "protection" and into a form of state-mandated silence that isolates those seeking help.

Medical Developments and the Need for "Holistic Care"

The Act is built on a premise that "gender-affirming" care is the only safe pathway for individuals experiencing gender distress. However, substantive medical and psychological developments from 2024 and 2025 suggest that this "affirmation-only" model lacks a robust evidence base. **To provide truly holistic care, we must consider the spirit, the mind, and the biological reality of the person.**

- **International Evidence (The Cass Review):** The final report of the Cass Review (2024-2025) in the UK concluded that the evidence for medical interventions like puberty blockers is "remarkably weak." Consequently, many European nations have shifted toward a model that prioritises comprehensive psychosocial support over immediate medicalisation.
- **The Validity of "Watchful Waiting":** Longitudinal studies consistently show that for many, gender distress resolves naturally if they are supported through a period of "watchful waiting." Under Victorian law, a minister who encourages this cautious, exploratory path could be accused of "suppression," despite it being the emerging global clinical standard.

- **The Shift to Psychosocial Support:** Leading health authorities in Sweden, Finland, and Norway have shifted away from medical intervention toward psychosocial support as the first line of treatment. By labelling non-affirming care as "suppression," the Victorian Act effectively outlaws the "watchful waiting" and exploratory talk therapy that international experts now recognise as the safest and most effective approach.
- **Biological Reality and Mental Health:** Recent data suggests that for many, gender distress is symptomatic of deeper psychological needs. A holistic approach—which I argue pastoral care provides—looks at the whole person: their spirit, their mind, and their biological reality. To legally mandate that a minister must "affirm" a person's feelings while ignoring their biological sex is to demand that we provide incomplete and potentially harmful care.

Impact on Individuals and Autonomy

A "holistic" approach requires that an individual has access to all perspectives. If the law suppresses religious or traditional views on sexuality and gender, "informed consent" becomes impossible.

Immediate Impact: Individuals are denied the right to explore their faith's teachings as a solution to their distress.

Long-term Impact: We risk a generation of "detransitioners" who feel abandoned by a system that was legally forbidden from offering them any alternative to medicalisation.

For that matter, I am particularly concerned for those who undergo significant distress when denied the religious support they desire. By effectively narrowing the types of support available, the Act may:

1. **Isolate individuals:** Those who value their faith may feel they have nowhere to turn if their religious leaders are legally afraid to speak with them.
2. **Undermine Informed Consent:** A person cannot give true consent if the law has removed all options—including religious reflection on biological sex—from the table.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As a minister, my goal is to walk alongside people with compassion. I believe the current Act risks creating a system that ignores the latest medical warnings and violates religious freedom. I urge the Commission to:

- **Clarify the boundary between prohibited practices and protected, consensual pastoral care, including prayer and scriptural teaching.** A Clear Exemption for Consensual Pastoral Care: Explicitly state that prayer, religious counsel, and the teaching of religious doctrine—when requested by the individual—do not constitute "suppression."
- **Acknowledge international clinical shifts that favour holistic, psychosocial exploration over "affirmation-only" mandates.** Alignment with International Clinical Trends: Update the Act to recognise that "watchful waiting" and non-

medical psychosocial exploration (including g religious reflection) are valid, non-harmful pathways of care.

- **Restore the right of the individual to seek spiritual guidance that aligns with their conscience without the state intervening in that sacred relationship.**

Protection of Parental and Clergy Rights: Ensure that those providing holistic, non-coercive support are not threatened with criminal sanctions for refusing to follow an "affirmation-only" model.

Conclusion

True compassion involves seeing the whole person. By criminalising everything except "affirmation," the Act forces a narrow, ideologically driven path that ignores the latest medical warnings and violates religious freedom. I urge the Commission to restore a balance that protects against abuse without dismantling the holistic, faith-based support that so many Victorians rely on.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Respectfully,.

