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Israeli government considering ban on LGBTQ 'conversion therapy,' but bill put on hold

Coalition sources say the fact the bill to ban the widely discredited, harmful practice is even being considered is an achievement, but members of the opposition argue it wasn't immediately disqualified only to minimize potential backlash against two openly gay ministers.

By Jonathan Lis

Haaretz (21.06.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2BvjU2k> – The Israeli government will examine legislation that would prohibit so-called conversion therapy, which aims to change the sexual orientation of LGBTQ people, but is widely discredited by experts worldwide and is used despite no scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be altered.

The Ministerial Committee for Legislation will likely delay the bill proposal brought forward by Meretz Chairman Nitzan Horowitz in order to consider a more “moderate” version of the law that would be accepted by ultra-Orthodox parties, according to a government source.

The proposed legislation would ban “conversion therapy” and sanction so-called therapists with jail time, a fine, and revocation of their professional license.

The government source said that the fact the bill is being considered even though the coalition is made up in part by ultra-Orthodox parties, who oppose pro-LGBTQ legislation, is seen as an achievement.

Sources in the opposition, however, said the law was not immediately disqualified not in order to pass it at a later date, but to minimize offense to two openly gay ministers serving on the committee for legislation, and avoid criticism from Benny Gantz’s Kahol Lavan party, which promised it would advocate for the LGBTQ community in its election campaign.

Previous attempts at writing into law a ban on “conversion

therapy” have failed, including for bills proposed for former Health Minister Yael German, which never passed even a preliminary Knesset vote.

“‘Conversion therapy’ is murder,” Horowitz said at the meeting of the legislative committee. “It’s murder of the soul and often times the body too. These procedures result in self-harm to the point of suicide. What therapy means here is mental and physical abuse of teenagers.”

Horowitz said that professionals don’t believe the procedure can convert a person’s sexual orientation, and that it results in great harm. “The purpose of this law is to save lives,” he added.

“It’s our duty to locate the businesses of abuse, to revoke their licenses and charge them with a crime. Just as we would with a murderer or any person who causes the death of another person.”

Horowitz appealed to “all who see themselves as part of the fight against homophobia.” He named members of Kahol Lavan – including Benny Gantz, Justice Minister Avi Nissenkorn, and Tourism Minister Asaf Zamir – as well as Likud MK Amir Ohana, who is gay, in his appeal.

“It’s our legal and moral duty to save the next victims of ‘conversion therapy.’ It’s an opportunity for the Knesset to give a clear message – it doesn’t matter if you’re straight, gay, lesbian, or trans, we don’t want to change you. You are

beautiful and whole just as you are.”

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