

Right Honorable Ms Ruth Kelly
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
28th November 2006

Dear Ms Kelly

I write in relation to the proposed Sexual Orientation Regulations. The Government's announcement that they are to delay the implementation of the Sexual Orientation Regulations by 6 months in order to deal with what your good self described as 'difficult issues'. Your good self stated that the Regulations must 'make sure there is effective protection from discrimination [for homosexuals] while ensuring that people have the right to religious freedom' (BBC Radio 5, 26th October).

I share with you your desire to find the correct balance between non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, and the right to religious freedom. However, I am concerned that at the moment, the Government's approach to these Regulations has not found the correct balance.

Although there has been no draft of these Regulations, the Government consultation on the Regulations and indications given by civil servants working on the Regulations, have set out the preliminary position of the Government relating to the need to protect the right to religious freedom and the right to freedom of conscience.

This approach seems to be to offer exemptions from the Regulations for 'organised religion' (i.e. churches) but not for individual believers, and in particular, not for Christians who work in the commercial sector. As a Christian myself, I would like to explain why I think this approach is wrong, and why it discriminates against me and many others across the country.

As a Christian, I believe in the Bible's teaching that all people should be treated graciously and in a non-discriminatory manner – whatever their sexual orientation. I, along with many others in England (probably over 3 million according to a recent survey[1]), also believe in the Bible's teaching that the only rightful sexual relationship is between a wife and her husband. This is a rule given by God for the good of all people. Keeping to this rule has many positive results (including strengthening families and creating relationships full of trust) but breaking it has many negative results (including heartbreak, sadness, deceit and separation between people).

As you will no doubt agree, holding these longstanding doctrinal views is a very different thing from being homophobic.

If the Regulations remain unchanged then it would be fair to say that despite the intention for them to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, what they will

actually be doing is discriminating on the grounds of religion. For this to happen would mean the Equality Act (under which these Regulations are created) had failed. That Act did not intend to promote the rights of one section of society at the expense of discriminating against another section.

I wish to emphasise that it is crucial that I have the freedom to hold and adhere to my faith and beliefs at all times: not just at church on a Sunday. The reality for me as a Christian is that the teaching in the Bible is just as important to my life outside church as it is inside.

The Regulations must provide an exception to allow individuals to refuse to provide goods, services, facilities etc that would otherwise promote or assist the practicing of any sexual orientation in a way that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible (or for that matter, the teaching of the Torah or Koran).

I do wish to emphasise the point that Christians need to be free to follow the Bible's teaching about sexual morality in their jobs as much as in their private lives.

The Bible draws no distinction between when a Christian is at work and when they are at home: they are commanded to live according to the Bible at all times. It is also important to realise that offering Christians the freedom to live according to the Bible whilst at work would not damage the basic intention of the Regulations.

It will only be in the rarest cases that providing a good or a service to a homosexual will actually promote or assist extra-marital sexual practice. Furthermore, it is only in the few cases where a person refuses to supply goods, services etc based on a sincere belief in a longstanding religion, that the exception could be relied on.

Finally, because non-religious providers of goods and services vastly outnumber religious providers, in these small number of cases where a religious provider did need to refuse to supply their goods or services on the grounds of conscience, the person seeking those goods or services could simply go to a non-religious provider – their freedom of choice in the market place would not suffer.

I urge you to consider these points I have made, in particular the need for exceptions from the Regulations to protect individual Christians, and the minimal impact this would have on the overall intention of the Regulations.

Name	Address	Signature

