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# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 137**

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Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman





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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 137 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

[English]

For all members, please wait until I recognize you by name prior to speaking.

I'd also like to remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

Thank you all for your co-operation.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 25, 2024, the committee will resume its study of hate-motivated violence targeting the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

Prior to my welcoming our witnesses I would like to provide a trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to hate-motivated violence. This may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If at any point any participants feel distressed or need help, please advise the clerk for assistance. For all witnesses and for all members of Parliament, as always, it's important to recognize that these are difficult conversations, so let's try to be as compassionate as we can be.

At this point, I would like to welcome our witnesses. We have, from the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate for New Brunswick, Kelly Lamrock, child and youth advocate, who is joining us by video conference; from Egale Canada, Bennett Jensen, director, legal; from QueerTech, Naoufel Testaouni, chief executive officer; and from the Society of Queer Momentum, Fae Johnston, executive director.

At this point, we will begin with our opening statements.

Mr. Lamrock, you have the floor for up to five minutes.

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock (Child and Youth Advocate, Government of New Brunswick):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

I thank you the committee for its interest in this very important issue.

[English]

Maybe to start off I can simply share the experience here in New Brunswick. As some may know, we have been through a period of rather intense scrutiny. New Brunswick was the first province where the provincial government introduced so-called parental notification changes. In New Brunswick, it began with the claim that there had been hundreds of emails from parents who'd had bad experiences with the previous policy, which was to affirm and respect the choices of children if they chose to change the names or the gender identity pronouns by which they wanted to be addressed. There was an initial claim that hundreds of emails detailing bad experiences had come in to my office, which does have the power to compel documents. I asked for those and found, in fact, that there were four.

What is interesting is that, of the four emails that triggered the review of the policy, a number made reference to tropes that had become familiar to us in the child advocate's office. There were complaints of litter boxes and schoolchildren identifying as cats; claims of increases in attacks on children or women in women-only spaces; and, interestingly, a couple of references to the World Economic Forum. It's worth noting to the committee that many things can be traced back to a common information source. Indeed, we have seen an increase in the number of talking points and the number of bot accounts that repeat them.

The recent CPAC convention in the United States had a speaker who reminded people that the way to fight back against LGB rights was to isolate the T, and that trans people and changes in gender identity represent a new chapter that, unlike gay marriage or same-sex marriage, people have not had time to culturally digest.

It's the latest area where things might be new to people, and some of the same misinformation and misunderstandings are shared and amplified. We have seen a number of common ones, even in the traffic that we monitor here in the office—similar talking points—such as the idea that there is recruitment going on and that teachers are involved in conspiracies to keep things from parents. Some of those were the subject of a number of outside-the-province mail-ins and that kind of thing.

In fact, as a result of the recent changes, my office was directed by a legislative motion where, in the legislature, someone in protest of the changes asked us to have a public consultation to see where the public was. I have never had an issue in New Brunswick that drew so much out-of-province traffic, often repeating some of the same tropes.

As part of that review, we began interviewing families and teens themselves who are trans or have gone through some re-examination of their gender identities. The stories were heartbreaking.

One teacher said that since the matter has arisen, their child has had several incidents where they were told to kill themselves. There has been more religious targeting, with Bible verses screamed at kids. We have noticed an effort among some far right groups, even those outside the province, to recruit among religious or newcomer communities where these issues may still have some religious salience.

There were a number of folks who repeated to us in emails that if their child were trans, they would be thrown out of the house. The other trope that was common is that these were social, caused by societal pressure, that somehow it was just trendy to change gender identity, and that it wasn't real.

We know, of course, that the statistics indicate—and I'm sure some of my friends from Egale and other groups will share—that we have seen a significant spike beyond New Brunswick just in anti-LGBTQ2S violence, threats online, etc. We have seen more of an uptick in New Brunswick schools in the number of matters being dealt with in terms of harassment and threats against LGBTQ students.

In many ways, because of the panic-inducing rhetoric that again seems to have its source even outside Canada, let alone outside New Brunswick, repeating some of the same tropes that were present 30 years ago when same-sex marriage was debated—that there is recruitment and that there are links that, of course, don't exist between pedophilia and questioning your gender identity.... All of those have made a comeback.

I can tell you that, as an advocate, I have responded to a number of those. They all seem to use some of the same incidents. They all seem to quote some of the same things, including—interestingly enough—the common complaints about the World Economic Forum and litter boxes in schools.

We also are aware of cases in New Brunswick where two or three times children were thrown out by their parents from the home after being found to be trans or questioning their gender identity because the parents had come to believe some of the things they were reading online.

Certainly, in New Brunswick, the story has a somewhat happy ending in that the new provincial government has said that it will be amending the policy back to being affirming and respectful of every child, regardless of whether they're trans or not, to recognize the fact that children with capacity can, indeed, make choices around how they want to be called in day-to-day matters. They can choose their own name and pronouns, as any of us can.

• (1105)

The debate is not whether the state or the parent has the say; it is, in fact, when the child becomes capable of making their own decisions and when schools have to respect that.

I'm happy to—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr.—

Oh, sorry to interrupt.

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock:** I'm happy to take questions.

I was going to say that we have a number of things to fight misinformation online that we're looking at. I'd be happy to address that in the question period.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next I would like to welcome Mr. Jensen.

You have the floor for up to five minutes.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen (Director of Legal, Egale Canada):** Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

As was mentioned, my name is Bennett Jensen. I use he/him pronouns, and I'm the director of legal at Egale Canada.

Egale is Canada's longest standing, largest national 2SLGBTQI organization. It was founded in 1986 and, since that time, has been at the forefront of advocating for the rights of queer and trans communities.

I've been at Egale for just under two years. Unfortunately, in that time, I've had to spend the majority of my time litigating some of the issues that Mr. Lamrock spoke about. I've been counsel in litigation in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and, late Friday, we filed litigation in Alberta.

I'm incredibly grateful to this committee for undertaking this important study.

As Mr. Lamrock suggested, Egale does have a lot of statistics about just how much the rates of violence and crime against our communities have risen in recent years. What's particularly troubling is that the rate of violent crime in particular has risen. We'll be making additional submissions in writing to this committee. I'm going to use my oral remarks, my time today, to focus on a very specific kind of violence.

Although I'm appearing today as a lawyer, I won't be speaking about the law. I am going to use my time to bring a message to elected officials not just on this committee, Madam Chair, but across the country on behalf of the incredible gender diverse young people who I've had the privilege of getting to know over the past several years. That message is to please leave us alone.

Let me explain. The gender-diverse and trans population is exceedingly small. It is hard to get accurate statistics, but it is almost certainly less than one per cent of the total population. This community, as the Supreme Court recognized in the spring of 2023 in its landmark Hansman and Neufeld decision, is also extremely vulnerable. It is always hard to be different and to be in a minority, but trans people have historically been portrayed as sick, perverse and not real or valid. In the year 2024, I hope that it is not controversial to say, as the Supreme Court has, that there is no basis for this prejudice or stereotyping and that there is absolutely nothing wrong with being trans.

Yet, unfortunately, that is not the message that trans young people across this country have been hearing from some elected officials. As is not unusual with a tiny minority population, trans youth are not well understood by those who do not know them. That's generally okay as long as we continue to live in a country where difference is welcome.

There is well-established and long-established social science and medical expertise on how best to meet the unique needs of trans young people. So many parents of trans youth across the country are doing everything they can to create environments for their kids where they can grow and develop with support and acceptance.

Unfortunately, in recent years, trans youth have been the victims of extensive misinformation and targeting. Much of this has come from political leaders, leading to devastating consequences on the ground, because the truth is, if met with love and acceptance, trans kids are very typical. They have all sorts of different interests and personalities, and, as I have been told countless times, their so-called "transness" is the least interesting thing about them.

For many young people across the country, this ability to just experience their youth has been devastated through harmful political rhetoric. When the restrictions described in New Brunswick were introduced, they were unfortunately accompanied by careless and inaccurate public statements by political leaders. These statements had significant negative consequences, as we've already heard, for young people.

One parent told me how her son, who had been a happy-go-lucky young boy, young man, had to be picked up from a gas station across the street from school where he was hiding in the bathroom because he had been followed off campus at lunch multiple times. She said that she had to spend night after night for weeks on end sitting at the end of his bed because she was scared he would not make it through the night.

The trans youth I speak with want nothing more than to be left alone, removed from political discourse and allowed to just be teens and kids.

As elected officials, you have the power to change the realities of children and youth across this country, yes, through legislation and policy but also through your words. I urge all elected officials in this country to use that power to create a country where all of us, especially children and youth, have the chance to live freely and belong, no matter their identity.

• (1110)

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Jensen.

Mr. Testaoui, you have the floor for up to five minutes.

**Mr. Naoufel Testaoui (Chief Executive Officer, QueerTech):** Madam Chair, thank you for inviting me and QueerTech to contribute to this important conversation.

My name is Naoufel Testaoui. I'm the co-founder and CEO of QueerTech and a board member of Fierté Montréal and Montreal NewTech. I've worked with non-profits in Morocco, led a student placement organization in New York and managed teams at Microsoft in the Middle East and Africa.

QueerTech, Canada's largest 2SLGBTQIA+ tech group, represents 10,000 "queer in tech" professionals. Our mission is to "queer the tech ecosystem" by increasing representation, advancing leaders and empowering founders. QueerTech is vital to Canada, driving innovation and prosperity in Canada's economy via a diverse workforce.

When supported, the queer community is a powerful contributor to the economy. Canada's 100,000-plus queer-owned businesses generate over \$22 billion annually and employ over 435,000 Canadians.

I grew up in Morocco, where being gay is illegal. In 2007, I moved to New York City, but soon realized the flaws of the American dream. Seeking alignment with my values, I chose Montreal for Canada's leadership in human rights, education and inclusivity.

Sitting here as a witness today feels surreal. I never thought conversations surrounding basic human rights would be needed in Canada ever again. We're now seeing provinces restrict education and the right to knowledge. This hateful movement of disinformation is harming our most vulnerable: children.

Let me tell you two stories.

In their youth, Alex notices they are different, but doesn't understand why. In intermediate grades, Alex learns about gender identity and expression, feels seen and opens up to a supportive teacher. With knowledge and a support system, Alex has choices. They can advocate, confide or protect themselves.

As Alex starts to use social media, online hate begins. Some perpetrators are human, but many are AI-powered bots fuelled by algorithms that create echo chambers of divisive content. Some 72% of queer individuals are exposed to hate online.

At university, Alex connects with QueerTech. With resilience, community and skills, Alex excels in tech. After five years, Alex starts a business, creating jobs, contributing to the economy and giving back.

Charlie is just like Alex, except Charlie never learns about gender identity or hears their teacher speak positively about the queer community. Teachers and parents remain unaware of Charlie's struggles.

Charlie faces online hate and begins to believe the problem is with them, withdrawing from family and peers while encountering even more online hate. When they confide in their parents, misinformation leaves them confused and unsupported, isolating Charlie further.

Consumed with self-hatred, Charlie falls into the 40% of queer youth who are homeless, spiralling into addiction and self-harm. Like all trans Canadians, Charlie is more than five times more likely to commit suicide during their life. Even if Charlie survives, mental health struggles, financial insecurity and low resilience hinder them from thriving like Alex.

Nearly one-third of Gen Z identifies as 2SLGBTQIA+. They are the future leaders of our world. Do we want a nation of Alexes, thriving and contributing to society, or a nation of Charlies, enduring tragedy and self-hatred, and straining our economy and social services?

Police-reported hate crimes against queer people have risen 388% in seven years. We urgently need protection and support.

I hope my remarks today provide insight into the lived experiences of queer people and the consequences of inadequate support systems. We know the economic case for inclusion, but the cost of inaction will be severe if these harmful trends continue unabated.

The government should require transparency from digital platforms regarding their hate speech policies and their enforcement of them. AI should be regulated to prevent the amplification of hate speech, with safeguards for inclusivity. Anti-discrimination policies must be strengthened across all sectors, including tech, with clear guidelines for employers and legal recourse for those facing discrimination. Increased funding for relevant organizations is also essential.

I was a Charlie, growing up in Morocco. Canada turned me into an Alex. This is the best outcome I could have hoped for. I've already fled three countries out of fear for my life. If hate continues to rise in Canada, where can I go?

In closing, I urge the committee to consider these barriers and take meaningful actions to address them. Please take care of Charlie.

Thank you.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Testaouni.

Next, I would like to welcome Ms. Johnstone.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Fae Johnstone (Executive Director, Society of Queer Momentum):** Good morning, and thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak today.

As mentioned, my name is Fae Johnstone. I am a trans woman, I use "she" and "they" pronouns and I'm the executive director of the Society of Queer Momentum. When we saw the beginning of rising hate in Canada, we were one of the organizations that tapped in alongside our friends at Egale to support the response to governments and politicians restricting the rights and freedoms of vulnerable young people and their families.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to this committee for undertaking this study. It could not come at a more pivotal or urgent moment as we again see the rise of anti-2SLGBTQI+ hate. Unfortunately, we see both its normalization and its acceleration, and, now, its politicization by certain political parties and governments across Canada.

Every week I hear stories that break my heart: stories of terrified parents, scared kids and everyday Canadians who happen to be queer or trans who just want to live their lives and contribute to their communities but see this country becoming less safe and less free for them and their families. They are stories of rising violence that is not just targeting trans people but is rippling through the full queer community.

Since the 1960s, Canada and much of the world has been on a slow march towards freedom, human rights and equality for queer and trans people. Now we have unfortunately entered a period of global backlash. Transgender people are the convenient target. Bluntly, we look a little bit more different. We are often more visibly gender-nonconforming. I am a 5'11", broad-shouldered, deep-voiced trans lady, and I think I'm a great example of this, and I love that about myself and my community. Because of who we are and how we look, we force people to confront the hostility and stigma that many hold towards gender and sexual diversity. We represent through our very existence a rejection of the systemic misogyny, homophobia and transphobia that are unfortunately still embedded in Canadian society.

That, unfortunately, makes us a convenient target for those who dislike the possibilities and freedom that we embody, but while we are a convenient target, this is about so much more than 1% of the population. This rise in anti-queer and anti-trans hate, driven unfortunately by social conservative and far-right groups and their proxies, seeks to achieve three critical goals.

The first is to roll back acceptance of the broader LGBTQ community using the demonization and dehumanization of transgender people as a stepping stone to achieve broader regression.

The second is that they hope to use fear and misinformation to rationalize government interference in the fundamental rights, freedoms and health care access of diverse Canadians; to weaken the protection of minority rights; and to normalize governments overriding our bodily autonomy and putting themselves between families and the health care their kids need.

I would urge committee members to understand that there is a longer game at play here, and that the agenda these organizations and groups are pushing is not just about trans people but about restricting access to reproductive rights and health services, as well as restricting or weakening our human rights framework that keeps minorities of all sorts safe from hate and from government involvement in and restriction of our freedoms.

What scares me most in Canada today is witnessing this hateful agenda becoming mainstream. We have seen certain politicians, including members of legislative assemblies, members of provincial parliaments and, indeed, members of Parliament in the House of Commons aiding and abetting the rise of anti-queer and anti-trans hate with misleading slogans and dog whistles that embolden and normalize hate. Their purpose here is sometimes simple political self-interest. They cue their support to these groups in hopes that they'll show up at the doors and support particular parties, but in other situations we see politicians—

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** You're speaking too quickly. We no longer have interpretation.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Perhaps we're going to just try to slow down a little bit, okay?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I have a recurring problem with this.

My apologies to the interpreters.

**The Chair:** No worries.

Let's try to begin again.

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** In other situations, we see politicians amplifying this rhetoric because they have a shared agenda. Those social conservatives who have been quiet in the days since marriage equality are getting loud again. Their agenda, again, is not just about trans people. It's about a world where they would, if they could and if they can, roll back marriage equality, the rights of transgender people, reproductive rights and the social acceptance of queer and trans folks.

I would challenge, bluntly, any Conservative member of Parliament on this committee to look me in the eye and say that Pierre Poilievre's comments about gender ideology are anything short of propagating conspiracy and hostility towards queer and trans people. Those comments throw gasoline on the fire of rising hate, even as we see the freedom and the rights of members of our community restricted. Many of us, as you have heard, are terrified about the direction Canada is headed in.

I would urge those same MPs to tweet their support of transgender rights, and our right to dignity and freedom, and watch what happens next. Watch when your supporters turn on you and accuse you of supporting pedophilia, grooming and all sorts of related filth simply for supporting a minority's freedom. Watch as you are reprimanded by members of your leader's staff for showing your support for transgender people.

I am scared of where we are headed if anti-queer and anti-trans hate rises. I know where it leads. It leads to acts of extreme violence that result in lost lives, made possible by a tsunami of everyday acts of exclusion, discrimination and violence that will make life a living hell for transgender and queer people on this land.

I believe in a Canada where everyone is free; where we've shed our age-old hostility to gender and sexual diversity; where we treat our neighbours with respect, even if they, their families and their lives look different from ours. I dream of a Canada where my community doesn't have to come to spaces like this and plead that you'll see our humanity; that you'll see our right to dignity; and that you'll help us address a rise that threatens all that I love about this country—one that I have grown up in, in small towns and big cities, and that has welcomed me as the human that I am.

We have indeed come so far. We simply want to be left alone, to be able to contribute to our communities, to grow up in healthy families and to live happy, fulfilling lives. We have come so far, but we need you, as our leaders across political parties, because this should not be a partisan issue, to rise above the vitriol and resist the normalization of hate at the expense of queer people's humanity.

Thank you so much.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** I'd like to thank you all for your opening remarks.

At this point, we will move to our first round of questioning.

Michelle Ferreri, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC):** Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much to our witnesses for being here today. I appreciate your time and your information.

I guess I'll start with you, Mr. Lamrock. I would love any stats that you have. How long have you been with the organization, or how long has the organization been around?

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock:** Well, I'm with the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, so since 1867.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock:** I'm a legislative officer, Ms. Ferreri, but I was appointed advocate in February 2022.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Okay. Thank you.

You look great, by the way, for 1867.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock:** I do my best.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Your skin cream is working out for you.

Do we have comparative data on children who are seeking help or are identifying? That's what I'm trying to get to. Do we have that kind of data? Do you also have comparative data with other provinces?

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock:** I could take it under advisement and find some of what we received from StatsCan and others when I did the review of New Brunswick's policy and produced our "On Balance, Choose Kindness" report. I think what I have seen would back up what my colleague from Egale said, that the numbers in an absolute sense are low.

Have there been changes? There have certainly been more people identifying or indeed reporting at some point as questioning... Whether that's a function of an actual social change or simply more openness, it's hard to say. My dad's left-handed. They used to hit him at school when he used his left hand. We've all heard that one by now.

I haven't seen a whole lot that answers that question definitively.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Yes.

I guess I'm curious; as we're studying the rise in hate crimes in particular against 2SLGBTQI communities, where does Canada rank?

Mr. Jensen, are we sitting at the top? Do you know that number?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** Where does Canada rank internationally...?

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** In terms of the amount of hate crimes.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** As one of my fellow witnesses testified, there are many places on the planet where it is illegal to be gay or trans. If the point is that we're doing better than some other countries, that's a fair point. I think—

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I guess I would ask about countries where there is freedom comparable to that in Canada. I guess what I'm asking about in particular is hate crimes in countries where there is freedom and it's clear that gay marriage is legal, if that makes sense. Does that make sense?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I think so, but I would again point to the statistic that my fellow witness noted, which is that we're experiencing a 388% increase in hate crimes in this country.

Also, if I may say, Madam Chair, I do have evidence that I can share on your first question. We're filing that in court in the coming week, and we'll be able to pass it along to this committee as well.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** That would be super helpful. I appreciate it.

It's an interesting conversation, because.... Before this committee meeting, I was speaking with one of my friends who is trans and I was taking direction from them.

I also watched the documentary *Will & Harper*. I'm not sure if you guys are familiar with this, but *Will & Harper* is a great documentary by Will Ferrell about his friend Andy who transitioned to "Harper", and they did a cross-country tour in the States. It was very profound, because there's certainly a piece of the puzzle where people aren't bigots but don't know how to ask questions, and how do you start that conversation when everyone's afraid? There was one part in that documentary where they go into a bar. Harper goes

into the bar on her own, and you're kind of like holding your breath, and the minute the conversation really starts and everybody's comfortable was really amazing. I think that's a lot of the piece of the puzzle, going back to Mr. Lamrock's point about left-handedness or understanding what a lot of people don't know, so I think that's key.

The other thing I want to touch on is mental health. I recently visited my hospital, and a lot of this is provincial. We had a study in this committee on the mental health of young children. There's an 18-month wait list to see a psychiatrist in this country. Ten million Canadians don't even have access to a doctor, and this is critical. You know, I get phone calls from parents whose kids are really struggling, and they don't know where they fit, who they are or which direction they're going in, and they can't get help.

Mr. Jensen or Mr. Lamrock from a provincial legislature's perspective, where would you like to see the federal government go to ensure more access to doctors? Most of psychiatry, even in my own hospital, isn't covered under OHIP, which is in Ontario. It's not like that. I guess I would ask that question, if either Mr. Jensen or Mr. Lambert wants to answer. I'm sorry that there's only a minute left.

• (1130)

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock:** I can offer two quick thoughts, and Mr. Jensen may add to them.

One thought is that there is a national role for coordinating the response. In the 1990s, there was a conscious decision by provincial governments that we could save money by reducing the number of health professionals and spots for training. The idea was that, if we're going to have free health services, at least you restrict the number of billing numbers, restrict the number of entry points. It's a little like controlling an open bar by reducing the number of bartenders to slow things down.

We don't have a recruitment problem; we have a training problem because, if there were recruitment, there'd be a jurisdiction with too many. The national government needs a national training standard and a strategy about where we train.

One other thing is that I would echo is the call that one of the other witnesses made for the federal government. Part of the problem—I don't want to pathologize it—is that it isn't always a mental health issue, but sometimes about needing to be left alone.

I'd love to talk about algorithmic reform on social media and mandatory disclosure of algorithms that steer people towards more extremist content.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I wish I could get to social media. That was my next line of questioning, for sure.

**The Chair:** You'll probably have another opportunity at some point, Michelle.

**Hon. Kelly Lamrock:** I'd love to talk off-line.



**The Chair:** Next, MP Hefpner, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you so much to our witnesses for being here today. This is a really important conversation.

Some of us, Andréanne, Leah and I, were at the launch of *The Jackie Shane Story* here on Parliament Hill just last week, and I can tell you I haven't been able to get those images and that story out of my mind. Imagine a transgender lounge singer in the 1960s trying to make it work.

In the mid-2000s, I was a journalist at CHCH, and I got to know a trans woman quite well. She nominated me for a woman of distinction award because I was one of the few people who treated her like a human, and I know that you brought that up today, too, Fae.

That really moved me, and I ended up going with her to Montreal to do a documentary, a three-part series, on her transition, and I spoke to other trans people having surgery there. What I learned from them and from the doctors was that it wasn't cosmetic; it was life-saving surgery. This was surgery that was literally saving people's lives, and you could tell that the doctors were passionate about it. It was the only place in Canada at the time where you could get the surgery.

That was really important and then, after that period, I felt like our society was starting to accept trans people more, and we started to move towards this openness and acceptance, and now suddenly we're back. We just heard from CSIS last week, which warned us about increasing violence against trans people in particular.

Fae, I haven't really asked a question, but can you comment on that trajectory and where we find ourselves from the 1960s to 2024 going backwards?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** It is indeed the case. I'm concerned that we are headed backwards, and my worry right now is that I don't know how far backwards that goes.

Just yesterday I opened my phone and looked at a story in America where two trans people were assaulted out of nowhere—I think it was in Missouri—simply for being themselves. A crowd around them cheered on the assault.

Again, I'm 29 years old. I grew up when Ontario was going through the fight to protect gender and sexuality or gay-straight alliances in our schools. I remember when sexual diversity was a new thing, something that we were still trying to understand, though I'm not old enough to know the worst days prior to marriage equality.

However, I think we have seen this evolution where we've accepted a greater range of diversity when it comes to gender and sexuality. I think the concerning piece now is that, indeed, social media has furthered that polarization. To Ms. Ferreri's point, I think it has made it harder for us to have these conversations and to see the everyday experiences.

I just got back from six weeks travelling to six provinces and seven cities. I was chatting with factory workers, farmers, and dock workers in P.E.I., Newfoundland and B.C. Lots of them had never

met a trans person. I loved going up and saying, "I am very new to you." I was on stages, and my opening joke was something to the effect of betting that they weren't expecting to see a 5'11", deep-voiced trans lady on stage talking to them about gay stuff. My favourite thing is that they can see, when you sit down and have a beer and a conversation, that it comes back to fundamental realities—human beings are human beings regardless of how they look.

I grew up as a hockey player and a child of two military parents. There's nothing I love more than hanging out at a dive bar, chatting with somebody who is very confused about my gender. Then we move on to sports, and I get very confused about the sports, and then we just keep on going. This is part of what makes Canada an incredible country when we can see that shared humanity.

However, it's dangerous when we see that diversity turned into a bad thing. I think that is what's happening today. It is something that, indeed, some are aiding and abetting, but is also being pushed by groups that have always wanted a Canada where people like me are not invited into spaces like this. It's those same folks who opposed marriage equality, who opposed civil rights for LGBTQI+ people, who voted against banning conversion practices. All of those folks are getting louder and emboldened in this environment.

• (1135)

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** We're hearing, even in this Parliament, in this day and age, Conservative members saying they would vote down gay marriage today. We have the Leader of the Opposition blaming Justin Trudeau for radical gender ideology.

**Some hon. members:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** I'm sorry for the interruptions from across the table, but I think your point is well made.

Now, you've turned to litigation against some of these provinces. I was in Alberta for pride...last summer. That community was really scared about that legislation.

Maybe I'll turn to you, Bennett, because you're the expert on this. Why is litigation the right move at this point?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I can't emphasize enough how much I wish I didn't have to litigate. I would love to not be litigating, and I will answer your question directly in a moment.

However, I also think, again, back to Ms. Ferreri's comments, which I think so nailed the issue on the head. So much of my work is also thinking about how we can take down the temperature and have conversations where we're not so polarized and we return to humanity. As I said in my opening remarks, it makes sense if you have questions about what it means to have a trans kid, if you've never met a trans kid or a parent of a trans kid.

I think the important part—and how I get back to litigation—is that we take a beat. We listen to experts like Mr. Lamrock, like the medical experts who aren't new at this, even if some of us may feel new at it, and we just take down the temperature before acting.

I'm sneaking in other answers here too. I think there are definitely health care access issues that exist. Although I would echo what Mr. Lamrock said, that psychiatrists in particular aren't necessary, barring other mental health challenges—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** That's fair enough. Excuse me.

**The Chair:** Andréanne, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank the four witnesses for joining us today.

I've been taking a lot of notes since the beginning of this meeting.

I'll try to focus on finding solutions. The statistics are striking. Hate crimes against trans people have been on the rise. I watched the documentary Lisa mentioned. It's interesting to see how things are evolving and to compare the eras. Some things are moving forward and some are moving backward.

Though this study, we're trying to better understand the increase of these hate crimes against communities and find solutions.

Mr. Testaouni, many people have brought up the fact that social media and artificial intelligence are contributing to this situation. However, they also have an impact on violence against women. We've seen that since the emergence of misogynistic movements and groups. I watched the documentary on École Polytechnique and incels. I get the impression that it's more or less the same thing for those communities.

Let's focus on finding solutions. What could we do? Should legislation be passed to regulate online hate speech?

• (1140)

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** I just want to remind everyone of a report written by the Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University. In that report, they showed that 72% of the LGBT community was exposed to online violence and that 27% of those people were personally attacked. The statistics are still very high.

Artificial intelligence has greatly contributed to increasing these percentages, as algorithms strongly foster engagement on those platforms. What we need are policies aimed at countering discrimination and promoting transparency when it comes to moderation on those platforms.

Today, we know that artificial intelligence is also being used to moderate comments on these platforms. The problem is that AI doesn't always recognize online violence or hate. Artificial intelligence doesn't recognize nuances.

Greater transparency and policy development to address online violence are needed. We're willing to work with everyone to create those laws.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** We obviously understand that freedom of expression is not curtailed when hateful rhetoric is denounced. However, there has to be a limit, which is always difficult to set in this kind of legislation. We're well aware of that.

I'd like to go back to AI now. I'm asked a lot of questions about the impact of violence in a context where AI is being used more and more. Sometimes it's a matter of fake news. This morning, I watched a report on false pornographic images and other misinformation circulating in the communities. The impact is apparently very real.

Could you tell us more about that?

You said that algorithms are being used to try to control what is said online.

What could be the solution when it comes to using artificial intelligence?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** The first solution would be to look at how to create transparency when it comes to moderation on these platforms. I think the government and this committee should create very clear definitions of what constitutes hate so that this content can also be moderated on those platforms. We need transparency about the moderation.

Another possibility is to create a system to help victims of attacks report them easily. We also need to get the relevant statistics from those platforms so that we are aware of these situations.

Government, corporations and organizations like ours need to work very hard together to create online outreach programs. Our young people need to be able to recognize this phenomenon and know what action they can take.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Jensen and Ms. Johnstone, I see you nodding your head. I'll come back to other themes in my next turns to speak.

Do you have anything else to add on the issue of online hate speech or artificial intelligence?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I will answer in English.

[*English*]

I defer to my fellow witness on the specifics, but I think he's exactly right.

In response to your point, Madam Chair, I think freedom of expression is often misunderstood in this context. There are so many spaces in which expressive content is appropriately regulated. Freedom of expression isn't intended to mean that there can be no rules around appropriate speech in particular contexts.

There is much more to say about that, but I'll leave it there.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I will also make a few brief remarks in English.

[*English*]

I would just say that online hate is the same issue as in-person hate.

We need to support these kinds of dialogues in local communities to fund the organizations. They're chatting with young folks to help them understand because we're seeing the radicalization of our young folks through far-right groups, and so I would just say that there is a path forward.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** There is no interpretation.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have no interpretation.

Are we good?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** The interpretation is working now, but there was no interpretation for about 15 seconds. Perhaps the last few comments could be repeated.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Take about 25 seconds to respond.

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I would say it's the same issue online or offline. We need public education, support for the organizations that are there to have these conversations in schools and with families. We take the fire out of this by getting back to everyday dialogue with folks who may look or think differently from us.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

MP Gazan, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Thank you so much.

I want to build on what you were talking about, Mr. Jensen, about freedom of speech—what I actually call "inciting hate". The he CSIS report 2023 said:

The ideologically motivated violent extremism [IMVE] threat is complex, constantly evolving, and fueled by entities [individuals, cells, groups, or networks] driven by a range of influences rather than a single belief system.

I'm going to give you an example of how freedom of speech has been politicized: Jordan Peterson lost his licence to practise psychology because of inciting hate—transphobia, misogyny, anti-in-

digenous racism and residential school denialism. Why is it dangerous for political leaders to lift up folks, who have been charged with inciting hate, in the name of freedom of speech?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** Thank you for the question. I'm just scribbling notes. I'll make a few comments.

I think the first, almost academic, point is that much of our law and thinking around freedom of expression was developed in the context of the town square. What it doesn't account for is the power of the multiplication, which can happen online, with all of the other examples that are coming up. I would just encourage the committee, through the chair, and everyone to know that it doesn't translate perfectly, and there's still a tremendous amount of space for online regulation that doesn't violate the right to freedom of expression.

The second thing I would say, in moving into professional speech—which was the context of the Jordan Peterson case—and professional discipline, there are limits on what we as professionals can say in the context of our profession. For example, lawyers are restricted in what we can and can't say in court all the time. There are protocols, as in this committee, about how we need to direct our comments and what we can and can't talk about.

Similarly, the bargain for—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Why is that dangerous for a leader to lift up somebody like Jordan Peterson?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** What I would say is that it's dangerous when that nuance is lost and people like Mr. Peterson are held up as some sort of beacon of free speech. There's a lot of misinformation built into that.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes. It's disinformation, I would say—absolute disinformation—based on much of what you said.

I just want to go on to disinformation. I know that a lot of the arguments have been around deforming bodies, and I find it hilarious because women have been getting boob jobs and facelifts since time immemorial, so I know it's not about plastic surgery and deforming bodies. Is that not right?

I ask that because, Fae, you spoke about an attack on bodily autonomy, and I've been speaking a lot about how—going after trans bodies and women's right to choose—there is an overall attack on bodily autonomy, which is often based on disinformation and fuelled by folks politically right now. Have you seen a shift, in recent years, of a growing attack on bodily autonomy?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** Absolutely. I think, first and foremost, that if we look to what's happening in the U.S., there's a trajectory that plays out. There's a playbook being used here, and it often starts with trans kids in the classroom and this misinformation around litter boxes. Then it jumps to transpeople and young folks as health care. Then it becomes the precedent of governments restricting the ability of parents to get their kids the health care that is recommended by their family physicians, which is what we're seeing in Alberta. If we did that on any other kind of care, we would see outrage across the political spectrum. However, we've seen silence from certain sides of the political spectrum because it's about trans kids. Just after that policy was introduced or alluded to by Premier Smith, you saw pro-life organizations leaning in further. When Mr. Lamrock alluded to mail-ins in New Brunswick, those were paid for by Campaign Life Coalition, the anti-abortion lobby, who are playing a long game here to restrict the access for trans kids to their health care and to set a precedent to remove bodily autonomy from women and gender-diverse people with regard to other forms of health care, too.

• (1150)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you.

I mean, these are charter rights—and this is for you, Mr. Jensen. I don't understand this. We have a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Provinces are also obliged to uphold the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Why is this happening?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I wish I had an answer, but I can confirm that everything being proposed...or that the three pieces of legislation that passed in Alberta last week are violations of charter rights, quite simply. We saw, in Saskatchewan, that a court agreed with us that the so-called pronoun policy would cause irreparable harm if it was allowed to continue into effect, and then the notwithstanding clause was used. We're in a dangerous moment in this country, as well, with the increased comfort with the notwithstanding clause.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Premiers are using a notwithstanding clause to just usurp charter rights. Is that right?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** Yes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Could that happen federally?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** It's possible. Obviously, the notwithstanding clause can be used federally, so I hope—

**The Chair:** Thanks, Leah.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vien, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for being here today. We're very pleased to have you.

Ms. Johnstone, this is not the first time we've seen each other.

I want to start by setting the record straight. I think it's important to do so.

Ms. Johnstone, I thought you were being a bit unfair when you targeted the Conservatives. I think we're off to a bad start. The Conservatives as you describe them are not what I see in the party to which I belong. Since you mentioned Mr. Poilievre—you named

him—I invite you, in all friendship, to read what has been written about Mr. Poilievre and the statements he has made. I am thinking in particular of his statement that women have the freedom to control their own bodies and to have an abortion, if that is what they want. Mr. Poilievre has clearly positioned himself as pro-choice.

I would also like to inform you, if you don't already know, that our political party includes people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. One of them holds a very senior position, that of deputy leader. She was appointed by Mr. Poilievre. Let's be careful. Let's not conflate things that may make the Conservative Party look bad. Our party actually voted against conversion therapy. I wanted to let you know.

I will conclude by saying that Mr. Poilievre was clear on the fact that he would never open the abortion debate or introduce a bill on that issue.

I'll get back to the conversation we need to have today. This is a complicated study. We're talking about violence against various groups in society.

We, the Conservatives, are against violence of any kind. Our mantra is well known to everyone, and everyone has understood it well. It's about making the victim our primary concern, as violence has increased across the country. Violent crime is up 116% over the past nine years.

I wonder if it might also be a question of culture. I am a former member of the Quebec National Assembly. A friend of mine, my former press secretary, is openly gay. He is openly gay. He came from France, and he left that country at 18 because he wasn't able to live as a homosexual. He came to Canada, and he's flourishing today. When he went to a Maghreb country, he wasn't even able to share a room with his spouse. In the morning, they had to separate so that nothing would be obvious.

Homosexuality is not a problem. In any case, it doesn't bother me. There are gays in my family, among my friends and in our community. Wouldn't it be a cultural issue to reach out and welcome those who are different?

Ms. Johnstone, you said you went to meet with people on the ground to better understand this reality and to reach out. I am not sure it is a good idea to exclude parents or to target them just because they want to have information about what is going on at school. I'm a mom, and I'm old enough to be a grandmother. I would like to have that information about my child at school. Does that make me someone who is against trans people? No, it does not. I sincerely believe that there are people who are not born in the right body. I'm sure of it.

I'm here to make a comment and express how I feel. That's what I have done this morning. I think our guests appreciate that.

It's a matter of understanding the problem and seeing how we can address it. Parents need reassurance about all this. At the end of the day, you can't exclude parents from these situations. Violence against trans people, to me, is unacceptable. I would very much like you to be able to show leadership and meet with people in our schools and community centres. I also hope that we can continue to inform people about diversity, as Mr. Jensen so aptly said in his opening remarks.

• (1155)

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Vien.

[*English*]

Pam, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thank you.

Ms. Johnstone, I just want to say that I, too, am 5'11". I actually love meeting women with whom I can look eye to eye.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** It's the opposite, as far as I'm concerned.

[*English*]

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I want to talk a little bit about political rhetoric because a few years ago, when we had passed Bill C-16, I became the target of a Campaign Life Coalition phone thing about abortion and also trans rights. It was because we didn't want Rachael Harder chairing the status of women committee when she voted against Bill C-16 and did not support a woman's right to choose. I actually answered the phone at one point and when I asked the woman...she said to me that trans people don't actually exist. She was a lovely older lady, to be honest with you, but she had been fed all this information and truly believed what she was saying to me.

In February, the Leader of the Opposition said there's no space in women's bathrooms, change rooms, shelters, sports and more for trans women and trans girls.

At the last meeting, I mentioned that there was a nine-year-old girl in British Columbia with a pixie cut. A parent demanded that she provide a birth certificate to prove that she was actually a girl. This actually transcends far beyond just kids who are questioning their identity; it's making people question all kids who might look different.

I'll start with you, Ms. Johnstone.

How does the political rhetoric out there impact the way that Canadians think about issues?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** Thank you very much for the question. I hope to respond a bit to the previous statement as well in my remarks.

First, I think the political rhetoric encourages and emboldens the playground bullies to mistreat the trans kid, the gay kid or the kid who just looks a little bit different, so it contributes. When you're hearing your political leaders say that there's a conspiracy in schools and that there's a concern around this gender ideology thing, it emboldens that kid—who might be a teenage hockey jock; I know those kids well from my days in those hockey change rooms—to mistreat their trans or queer peer.

Just to set the record straight, I was in the room for Bill C-16. I was also in the room for the effort to ban conversion practice and I did see half of the Conservative caucus vote against the initial iteration of that bill.

I also saw that the previous leader's—Erin O'Toole—removal as leader was contributed to by what I believe was his pressure on the Conservative caucus to ensure a vote in favour.

I would add that there is great concern when you have a politician or a party leader—Pierre Poilievre—going to the defence of premiers in Saskatchewan, Alberta and New Brunswick, who are overriding the charter-protected rights of those children and who are rationalizing and defending the restriction of health care access for vulnerable young people.

I do not believe this is intrinsic to the Conservative Party. I look on my parents who voted Conservative. I have many Conservatives in my circle. I remember reading Ms. Lantsman's article in *The Globe and Mail*, I believe it was, urging the Conservative Party to leave this homophobia and transphobia behind.

The concern I have is that there is one party in Canada elected into the House that is engaging with dog whistles and rhetoric and I think we see that with the remarks on gender ideology. I don't believe this is intrinsic to Conservatives. I just invite us to make this a non-partisan issue. It's hard to do so when we see this rhetoric continue to be used at rallies and when we see no Conservative member of Parliament, including our age-old allies in your party, speak up internally or externally to express concern.

I watched fearfully as the Conservative Party convention, last September, voted in a policy that would ban me from accessing women's washrooms. I think about the homeless trans woman who's kicked out of her house and her inability to access a woman's shelter if that policy passes into law, despite those feminist organizations wanting to serve her.

I don't want this to be a Conservative issue. I don't want this to be a Canadian issue. However, when your leader and certain members of your party make it a Conservative issue, I will do everything I can to cease that.

Thank you.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** You need to be mindful, as well, to go through the chair.

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I apologize.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I only have 20 seconds left. I did have a question about support at home, but maybe we'll get to that in another one.

I certainly agree with you. I remember a Conservative member filming a video in a men's washroom and questioning why there were tampons in there when we offered free tampons. It was subsequently deleted, but it was put out there.

Anyway, thank you.

**The Chair:** Andréanne, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll go back to trying to find solutions. I would like to have recommendations that we could include in our report to counter this hate, this rise in hate against communities.

Online hate and artificial intelligence have been discussed. However, education is also needed. We want to strengthen the presence of organizations in communities to raise awareness. All of this was covered in the witnesses' opening remarks.

Mr. Testaouni, knowing that education obviously falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces, what can the federal government do in terms of funding to help organizations?

How can it collaborate, at least in terms of education?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** The federal government can provide funding to organizations like ours working on the ground to help them create training programs.

The biggest danger we're facing is online disinformation. That's what we're talking about today. Programs need to be created to educate not only young people about online disinformation, but also the entire population. Everyone must be able to recognize it.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** That's what your organization does in various spheres of society, particularly in the workplace. I'm also thinking of Fondation Émergence, which focuses on raising awareness among seniors through its Aging Gayfully initiative. Each organization has a specific clientele. As for your organization, you are looking specifically at the issue of human resource recruitment and everyone's place in the workplace. In your case, more sustainable funding would be helpful.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** Yes, that would be helpful.

There should also be training programs on artificial intelligence so that developers can develop technological tools on ethics and inclusion. They need to develop models capable of not only recognizing online hate, but also blocking it.

Thought should also be given to designing programs for companies and developers of artificial intelligence systems so that they can develop models that recognize online hate and manage the problems that go with it.

**The Chair:** That's great.

Thank you.

[*English*]

MP Gazan, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

I want to let everybody know here that this is not enjoyable for me. Humanity was one of the things that was brought up, and one of the things I know about it is that when you strip people of their humanity, you can justify the most unjustifiable acts.

I know, just from my own history, what that looks like on the ground. I worry about somebody getting killed, which is why I was really supportive of this study.

I want to go back to the dangers of imposing the notwithstanding clause and feeding into social conservatism. I know there have been petitions tabled on the floor of the House of Commons denying the right to access bathrooms in the name of women's and girls' rights.

Is this a growing risk? I don't think I'm being paranoid, which is why I think....just because I see it happen in real time.

What can we do as legislators to protect our Canadian charter, which is currently under attack in the name of so-called freedom? I call it "freedom for some and not for others".

Can you answer that?

• (1205)

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** A commitment by all political parties not to use the notwithstanding clause would be very welcome, especially in this context where we're talking about a tiny population that is not well understood.

The idea that the interests and rights of that population could be overridden is terrifying, and I echo your concern about death. It is chilling, and I may sound dramatic, but I don't intend to be: I am terrified about the rates of suicidality that will happen and already are happening.

We're seeing policies in this country that mirror what we've seen south of the border, and we now have evidence from south of the border that the policies result in up to a 72% increase in suicidality for gender diverse youth because they are the subject of political discourse and ill thought out policy objectives.

It's really a scary moment; that's what I would say.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I would say that human rights are human rights. When we attack the human rights of one, I always question who's next, especially when we're doing it in the name of freedom, and that freedom is actually infringing on the human rights of an increasing number of populations around the country.

Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Gazan.

Anna, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

Excuse me. I have a bit of a cold.

I want to address a crime issue that is concerning to me. The latest crime stats for the last six months of 2024 compared with the whole year of 2023 show it is up by 50%. That scares me. Recently, in my own community, a young child witnessed his father getting shot by a repeat offender and now feels that he let down his father because he couldn't protect him.

When we look at hate crimes and their percentages, 48% of hate crimes are based on race; 29% target religion, and 13% involve sexual orientation. In terms of cybercrimes, 41,162 were reported from January to June 2024 just this year alone in Canada. That's alarming to me.

People are running scared. They're afraid. I have constituents who tell me they're afraid to even open the door because they don't know what they're going to see. I had a constituent this weekend who had just installed a camera, one of those.... I don't know what they're called.

**The Chair:** Was it a doorbell camera?

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Thank you.

Someone was ringing the bell while wearing a balaclava. She immediately phoned the police because she wondered why this person would go to her door.

With this huge jump in crime against women especially, and against LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as the online crime, what does this government need to do? I'm seeking your advice. What can we do to prevent this? We obviously have to change the sentencing, but what would you suggest?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** Thank you for the question.

I think I would disagree with what I heard at the end about sentencing, but more generally, this is where the law is really limited.

One of the most frustrating parts of my job as a lawyer is that people often want a clean legal solution to complex social problems, and there often isn't one.

I think what are being raised are really complex questions of the way...almost the temperature of the nation. That's why I keep talking about taking the temperature down and how we can see each other's humanity.

We can criminalize whatever we want. We have clear charter rights. But we can't shake our charter at somebody when they're coming at us to commit a crime. That isn't, of course, how it works.

We need to live in a society where the norms that we are enforcing among ourselves are protective and inclusive, and value all of us. The rising hate online and the kind of increasing polarization

that we see in our society are, I think, the challenge, which is why I'm so grateful to this committee for undertaking this study. There are complex answers.

I don't think there is a clean legal solution here. This is why I chose to spend my remarks talking about being really careful with the way folks in a position of leadership in the country speak about these issues. They can often be inadvertently inflammatory. I think that most political leaders are very well intentioned, but there are consequences sometimes from the ways in which these issues are spoken about.

● (1210)

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Mr. Testaouni, you shared with us that you came from Morocco. What is the penalty there for hate crimes compared with Canada?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** There are no clear laws around that.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Okay, there are no clear laws.

One of the things I feel that we need to do in this country is to get educated. I agree one hundred per cent.

For me, it doesn't matter where you come from or who you are: Everybody should be treated with respect. My grandparents raised me that way, and to this day, I believe that one hundred per cent.

What do we do to individuals who don't abide by the laws of this country, who continue to commit these crimes? If we continue not to punish them, how will they ever learn?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** We want the Internet to be safe for people to use and for our communities to thrive on it. There are multiple solutions to find.

Regarding online hate, there is a lot of education, which we've discussed, that needs to happen, but we also need these online platforms to have more moderation to limit the spread of hate. We need them to report the numbers and the individuals who have been reported so we can find solutions together.

There is a lot of work that needs to happen, and we're committed to doing that work with all of the parties. I invite you to work together on this.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Anna.

MP Serré, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** I'll be sharing my time with Emmanuella.

[Translation]

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Serré.

[English]

Thank you so much to all of our witnesses for being here with us today to share your testimony and answer some of our questions.

I found today's testimony extremely touching. It brought me back to my teaching days. I taught ethics and religious culture in a Quebec school. One of the focuses or units that I would teach was gender education. I would teach my students about the gender spectrum and the sexual orientation spectrum because I knew that I had students from different backgrounds, and there were members of the 2SLGBTQ community, and I wanted them to feel like they had a safe space. If someone was at least mentioning it in their classroom—which I don't think other teachers were necessarily doing at the time—they could speak to me out of class and could also teach the rest of the students to be good human beings and to treat each other with respect.

I don't know how aware you might be of the way that different provinces handle their education systems and what the curriculum is in different provinces, but how important is it to include gender education in the classroom so that these students hear it from teachers who are doing it in a very respectful manner and at least educating all of the class about issues that may come up or things that members of the 2SLGBTQ community face?

Anyone can answer the question. I have a question afterwards as well.

I guess we can start with Fae Johnstone.

• (1215)

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** This education is critical. It looks different in different provinces. To be clear, from a young age, we often talk about representation of different kinds of families. There's an incredible book, *From the Stars to the Sky to the Fish in the Sea*, by a trans author named Kai Cheng Thom.

It's a book about kids from different kinds of families being given the freedom to be themselves and explore who they are. This kind of education is a preventative factor against bullying so that kids who might be hearing some messages at home that are hostile to our community or that aren't as inclusive as we would like are getting that different education in the classroom. It allows those queer and trans kids to be seen and to feel supported.

Growing up in New Brunswick and Manitoba, and then coming to Ontario, I didn't know much about queer or trans people until I tripped out of the closet as a queer person at 16.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Fae. Could you slow down a little bit for the interpretation?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** My apologies, Madam Chair.

I would simply stress that without this education, queer and trans kids don't get the language to know who they are and to feel pride in themselves. Without that, they are taught shame and stigma. This education should be continued, strengthened and furthered so that there's consistent education across every school in every province and territory.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you very much.

I think that covers a lot of where I wanted this to go, because I don't think that it's necessarily mandated in the same way at every level. I think it's really up to the teacher to incorporate it as it currently stands, at least in my province and at least at the high school level. I appreciate that.

I know that my colleague, Ms. Gazan, asked a question earlier on what recommendations you might have to provide to our committee on how to prevent and stop the increase of hate.

I don't see him online anymore. I noticed that Dr. Lamrock wanted to raise his hand, so I wanted to give him an opportunity, but he may no longer be online.

**The Chair:** He is not. We're trying to connect with him, but, at this point, we haven't been successful.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Does anybody else want to chime in? I know that only one person ended up answering that question. I think it was Mr. Jensen.

Does anyone else want to chime in on that and give some recommendations?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** When there is an absence of education, misinformation and disinformation take over. That's what also fuels this hate. This education is critical so that people are aware of all of these questions.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** To the person who just spoke—I can't see you on the screen anymore, I'm sorry—you earlier mentioned online harms and the fact that we need to protect these spaces and forums. A lot of 2SLGBTQI+ people are experiencing online hate. This is where they get most of their harassment. This is where a lot of violence begins.

You said that you would want platforms to report the numbers and the stats around how frequently it's happening, and you mentioned that we should be working together. Do you have any specific recommendation as to how the federal government should intervene here and move ahead in that direction?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt. We're already about 20 seconds over.

If you have any answers that you don't have an opportunity to give members, perhaps you can incorporate them into some other answer and/or submit them in writing after the fact.

Michelle, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks so much for this. I have a couple of things I want to dive into that you guys have talked about in the conversation that's happened.

One of my favourite doctors is Dr. Stuart Shanker in the field of self-regulation. When you speak about kids who don't know who they are or what they are, that's a real challenge. Then, if you don't have parents who have the tools or resources to communicate that to the kids, it can be a real swirl for disaster. I love one of the sayings of Dr. Shanker, that "labels are for spice drawers". It's one of my favourite things, because the label in itself can be a double-edged sword, right? I think Dr. Seuss was way, way ahead of his time when he was like, "a person is a person". I'm a big Dr. Seuss fan. So I think that's a really big piece of it.



To Mr. Jensen's point, you touched on something very important that I think we have to acknowledge but I'm not sure we can, or how we would, ever legislate. What online discussion has done is it has prevented discussion. I don't see you. I don't see your body language. I don't hear your tone. I wonder how many of us have had a fight with our loved one on a text: "What did you say that for?" It creates a lot, and I see it a lot on social media.

When I first started on this committee, I was very interested in this, because I believed our children, especially those the age of my children, were guinea pigs, truly guinea pigs. They were given something that their brains weren't able to handle. Their prefrontal cortex wasn't developed. Now we're starting to see the research come out. I believe it's Australia that banned social media for kids under 16. A lot of people are having this discussion. It's a challenge.

Then, if at home the parents still don't know how.... We've heard some crazy testimony in this committee with sextortion. Parents—good parents—are sitting right beside their child watching a Raptors game, and this kid is getting bullied and threatened. It is wild. The only thing I can see is not having that, but it's their world and how they're going to grow up in it.

Mr. Jensen, how do you walk that line of freedom when the horse is out of the barn, so to speak, versus helping our kids navigate what I believe is destroying their mental health?

• (1220)

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I was chuckling to myself as I listened. I don't have children, but I have a niece and nephew whom I'm very close with. I was thinking about how they would possibly murder me for what I'm about to say, because I agree with so much of what you've said.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I would say that the flip side to this—then I'll probably turn to my fellow witness, if it's okay, Madam Chair, to speak more specifically about online regulation—is that it is powerful for people in minority communities to find community online. A lot of bad things, from a technical standpoint, came out during COVID, but one of the nice things, and one of the nice things online, is that sometimes—

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** It's a double-edged sword.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** It's a double-edged sword. I would say that.

I think the level of toxic and harmful bullying that the young people I work with experience is real. A lot of misinformation—Mr. Lamrock spoke about the kitty litter misinformation—has been perpetuated online. That has been very dangerous as well.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I want to just say the following, because we're studying this at the justice committee too, looking at how to put in place online regulations. Even this weekend, I'll tell you, I was scrolling and....

Look, I only have a minute left; this is such a big conversation.

I watched that security guard in Edmonton who was shot and killed. I watched it before I knew what I was watching, and our

children are watching this. Our children are literally being exposed to murder online, and it is so disturbing.

I also really wanted to get into housing with you. There are a million different avenues I want to discuss.

However, where I want to go with this is that these companies also have the ability to put in place algorithms to prevent that from being shown. That is where I was going to ask for your recommendation and whether you agree with an algorithm that prevents children from literally seeing murder and other things that can harm them.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** My mind was going in the same way; there are protected versions of online apps and websites for young people, and I think that's quite important.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I am sorry that we lost Mr. Lamrock.

I'll start with Bennett and then I'll go to the three of you.

I want to go back to the comment that was made earlier about the social conservatives. We know they've been emboldened by the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the U.S. You see that coming in Canada, and you see the movement here online and from our political leaders who are utilizing the abortion debate and gay marriage, but they're using the trans issue to get to those elements you mentioned earlier.

We heard a lot about the online hate and what we can do to look at that. We also see a lot of provincial premiers attacking trans and maybe utilizing that playbook that we see in the U.S. with the misinformation, and also with the notwithstanding clause. As well, we see a person, the Leader of the Opposition, who wants to be the next prime minister saying that he might use the notwithstanding clause. How scary is that?

I want Bennett to comment first on that.

• (1225)

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** It's very scary.

On the provincial point, it's a good opportunity to respond to a previous statement by another member on parents wanting to know what's happening with their kids at school. I think that's very fair, and I think the misinformation that happens is the suggestion or the impression that's given that there is some sort of conspiracy or epidemic happening at schools that parents aren't aware of. That's where it becomes dangerous. That's a really helpful example of ways in which some provincial leaders have given a false impression.

In fact, what is happening, as Mr. Lamrock and another member of the committee spoke about, is that teachers are using the judgment they do all the time to support young people as they grow up, using discretion to help them develop into the adults they'll become.

I would also add, to paraphrase Mr. Lamrock again, that we're seeing a scary moment where the "T" is being separated from the rest of the acronym, which is really scary.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Fae, would you care to comment?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I would echo.... First, the notwithstanding clause generally gives me concern, but if it is used, it should be used only with great consideration. In Saskatchewan, it was preemptively invoked to avoid a court's ability to limit the implementation of a policy that was found by a judge, I believe—and I'm not a lawyer—to potentially cause zero irreparable harm to children. If we're going to be responsible policy-makers and legislators, we should be responsible in our use rather than reactive, and it becomes dangerous if we allow that reactivity to take root because these are, under our charter, protected rights and freedoms.

To go off on what Bennett was speaking to, we want kids to have the freedom to be themselves, whether they want to wear a hijab or a cross, or whether they want to use a different set of pronouns. We absolutely value the role of parents in raising happy and healthy kids. What I would have loved to see in Alberta, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick was, actually, an announcement of more supports for parents, especially parents from newcomer or faith-based communities, where there might be different paces on these conversations. The fact that they didn't go that path or listen to the needs of those kids says a lot about their motivations, which were not in the best interest of their constituents but were unfortunate and cynical politics at play.

I want parents to be as involved in their kids' lives as possible, and there's a lot we could do in our education system on that front. What I take issue with is the creation of a false choice between the role of parents and the well-being or best interests of children. We can address both of these issues at the same time, but what that takes is engaging in good-faith conversations. It also takes recognizing that we have data that shows that 20% to 40% of homeless young people in this country are members of queer and trans communities, and so we need to be mindful of these issues. I want these kids stay in safe and supportive homes, but we need to empower teachers and schools to work with those families, and not to create a false choice that puts kids at further risk of harm.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you.

Mr. Testaouni, you mentioned online harm. What can we do? We have an online bill right now. Do you have any suggestions on...? We know that the Conservative Party is voting against it, and has been against it from day one. We have to make sure that this bill passes sooner rather than later because of extremists on that element. What would be your comments on that?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** We know that there is a lot of artificial intelligence that's at play here, and there are lot of deepfakes and things that are created, and we need to regulate that. There are laws that we need to pass to make sure that all this content that's getting created by artificial intelligence is regulated and moderated.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Andréanne Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's too bad that our fourth witness is no longer with us.

I believe it was you, Ms. Johnstone, who mentioned the issue of conversion therapy. I was more or less surprised to hear that it would always be there. You talked about an increase, if I understood correctly, despite the federal legislation.

Is that happening because groups are finding ways to get around the law and successfully perpetuate conversion therapy, in the name of religious principles?

Did I understand correctly?

• (1230)

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** Thank you for the question. I hope to be able to answer in French at some point.

[*English*]

What I would say is—and this is my concern from the early days of the conversion therapy legislation—that I applaud the decision of the House to pass this legislation and, indeed, would applaud the Conservative Party for voting in favour—

**The Chair:** We have, seemingly, lost the interpretation.

I will continue to speak in English and wait to see when the French interpretation will kick in.

Okay. We're good.

I'll watch the clock, and you can continue.

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I would say when Canada and the House of Commons passed the ban on conversion practice, I was very pleased, including to see the Conservative Party, and all parties I believe, pass this legislation. We were shocked. We were waiting for a fight, and then we didn't have to have one. It was hurtful to watch some of the commentary that played out in the earlier iterations of that bill.

My worry from the get-go—and with love to Liberal and New Democratic members—is that these things become symbols, and then they become symbols sometimes that we can use to make other parties look bad. My worry from the first of this was that conversion practice is an insidious, systemic issue. It is a practice that is hard to report, because if you're coming from a religiously conservative family, your ability to bring forward a report.... Police haven't received training on conversion practices in this country. Counsellors and therapists have received very little support. We saw a little bit of funding from the justice department, I believe, to help address some of that public legal education information, but it was a pittance compared to what's needed.

If we want to address conversion practice, we first have to understand the broader picture, which is that these practices exist in societies that have hostility toward gender diversity and sexual diversity. Then second, we have to recognize that we must listen to survivors and those who have been doing the work to address conversion practice, including organizations like the Community-Based Research Centre, which works on queer health. It's about supporting those organizations to explore, investigate and address these practices.

Unfortunately, after the legislation, much of the country moved on. It was the same issue when we saw trans rights legislation. Passing of legislation in the House of Commons does not eradicate hate, nor does it address a systemic issue that is causing deep harm in our communities. The way that we move forward is by working, through a whole-of-government approach, alongside civil society, faith leaders and medical professionals to understand and implement a strategy to address these critical issues, aside from just the moments that are important symbolically, but that are ineffective at truly addressing a complex issue.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Gazan, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I just want to say quickly that I also commend every member of this committee for participating. I know it's not an easy study.

I agree with you. You just spoke about the politicization, and I think we do that in different ways here—fighting the good fight.... I know that my online nickname now used by online extremists is made up of pronouns, because I use gender-neutral language, which I'm very proud of.

I want to ask you a question, Mr. Testaouni. You told a personal story. I was really touched by that. When I was young, I was kind of a high school reject, and the other rejects were part of the LGBTQ community. We all hung around together, and some of them made it and some of them didn't. The hate was great.

Why is it important to allow children to identify who they are, especially when they come from families where they have difficulty? Maybe they are being kicked out of the house, and the only safe place they have is school. Why is it important to allow children to identify who they are in schools?

• (1235)

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** It's because school is where we learn. Therefore, for them it's an opportunity to learn about these topics, learn about themselves and engage with the teacher in a conversation where they can also teach them and explain what's going on for them. When that doesn't happen, then misinformation and disinformation take over and, as we see, it can be fatal to these kids and their lives.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes. I think of the many friends I had as a young person who identified who they were at home and ended up getting kicked out. The only place they had safety—so that they

didn't become hard to house later on, because they had nowhere to go as kids—was the school.

Why is it important? I am worried about our charter and the misuse of the notwithstanding clause for political purposes, and the risk that it will have for kids. What can we do as legislators to really stand firm to protect our Canadian charter, especially around kids' rights?

**The Chair:** MP Gazan, I've already been a little generous with your time.

If you could answer that in 25 seconds or less, that would be great.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I think all parties could commit to not using it, period.

A quick answer to your previous point is that there's a lot of evidence showing that a single protective, supportive adult can be the difference between making it to adulthood or not for kids. We know all parents want what's best for their kids, and the majority will be able to love their kids through anything, but that's not everyone. For those kids, having access to a supportive teacher can mean life or death.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vien, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm pleased to see that we're able to have this conversation today. We don't understand everything, but we do agree on some points. I think it's important to open the discussion.

I agree with Mr. Testaouni that Canada is an extraordinary safe haven and that it shows great openness. Quebec, the province I'm from, is a land where people encourage sharing and where people reach out. I'm thinking of the Pride parade in Montreal. It has become a family celebration. That's very significant.

You raised a point that intrigued me. According to you, there are 100,000 queer companies that generate about \$22 billion in revenue in Canada. Is that just in Canada?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** Yes, that's right.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** You said it was 435,000 employees.

First, why do you need to mention those companies? What more do they bring to this debate for you to need to come and talk to us about them? What's special about them?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** There are two parts to my answer.

First, there is an economic cost to the problem we're discussing today. Not only is it a mental health issue, but it's also an economic issue. People who are uninformed about their gender may suffer from depression, and because of that, they are no longer productive in their jobs. There's a cost associated with that, and there's also a cost to parents.

Second, our organization is similar to other organizations in the United States, where research has been done on productivity among LGBT entrepreneurs and their employees. Three very important results were reported. It was shown that LGBT entrepreneurs produced 119% more patents, recruited 36% more members and had 44% more opportunities to exit their businesses. When the community is attacked, people are unable to thrive in the environment that stems from that.

• (1240)

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** In terms of the economic losses that could be related to non-recognition, violence or those issues affecting the community, can you tell us whether that has been assessed? Can this phenomenon be quantified?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** We did do some research on that. You will find the details in the document we provided to the committee.

In the tech sector, 36% of community members were discriminated against during the recruitment process. In addition, 9.5% of people believed they had been the target of discrimination. That means that 50% of people had a negative experience during the recruitment process.

Also, once people are hired by a company, those problems increase. Indeed, 56% of people have experienced discrimination because of their gender or identity.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** We don't get the impression that discrimination in the hiring process still goes on nowadays. It seems to me that people are not asked to declare their sexual orientation.

How is that possible?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** Discrimination takes many forms. I think there are a lot of biases in these processes. That's why we need more awareness programs. People need to be able to tell their stories. There's a lot of misinformation out there.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** I would like to ask you a sensitive question. Does violence or hate exist between members of your community? Do these companies provide a violence-free environment?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** No, our communities are not free from violence.

That said, a lot of work has been done to improve workplaces. Recently, in Quebec, legislation was passed to tighten up measures related to psychological harassment. Sexual harassment was also added to the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and certain laws were amended. Work is being done, and it is very much needed.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you.

I will close by saying this —

**The Chair:** I'm sorry—

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Madam Chair, you've given 20 seconds to other—

**The Chair:** Okay.

You may continue.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you very much.

I just wanted to tell you that, when I was Minister of Labour in Quebec City, I increased the statute of limitations for people seeking to file complaints about workplace harassment. I'm doing the same thing in collaboration with all the parties here. The goal is to give former employees under federal jurisdiction more time to file a complaint if they are victims of violence or harassment in the workplace. Little by little, we will get there.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dominique.

[English]

Sonia, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for your testimony.

My first question goes to Mr. Testaouni.

Mr. Testaouni, your organization is focused on breaking down barriers and connecting communities to support 2SLGBTQI+ people. You talked about more opportunities being given to entrepreneurs.

How can the government better partner with organizations like yours to ensure that the unique challenges faced by 2SLGBTQI+ community professionals are addressed, especially in industries and provinces where the climate is becoming more hostile?

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** The first thing that comes to mind is that a lot of organizations need funding and support, especially in periods when there are economic challenges. Organizations like ours need support from the government so we can deliver programs to our community.

As I mentioned, 36% of community members get discriminated against in the recruitment process, so what we put in place are training programs to support the community so we can prepare them for the future of work and what awaits them so they can be successful.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** I want to put an angle on the issues around online safety. I'm wondering how you think the tech sector and legislators can create and maintain an online platform that effectively safeguards free speech while also protecting individuals from harm and discrimination online.

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** As I said in my opening remarks, there are human perpetrators but there are a lot of bots that are powered by AI today. We would accentuate this program a lot. We need to have better legislation and policies in place so that these platforms can make sure that they remove these bots, and also that a moderation policy is created and that there is transparency with communities like us so that we understand how it's regulated. I think government needs to put a framework around that.

• (1245)

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you.

My next question goes to Fae Johnstone.

Thank you for coming again and for the work you are doing, Fae.

Talking about happy and healthy kids, you commented that the homeless community is a big part of the aftercare. What do you think the federal government can do? What is the action plan? I know an action plan is important. What more can our government do to decrease the amount of hate toward this community, and how can politicians play a role so they can lower the temperature and ensure community safety?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** First, my invitation would be for all parties to not engage with anything queer or trans in the next federal election. Let's just set it in a corner. Let's get back to it after the writ is dropped and after that's all done, and then we can have these conversations and find a path forward. I do not want an election where queer and trans issues are mentioned once, because it will not work well for us.

Second, I would say that I welcomed the federal government's 2SLGTQ+ action plan. I will say, however, that I was disappointed with the amount of funding committed.

We're talking about millions of Canadians and their families. We're talking about a community that has gone through decades of state-sponsored discrimination and exclusion at times and a society that is still hostile to us, so I would invite further investment and deeper partnerships with queer and trans civil society.

We know our issues. We know the programs and interventions that address health, social and economic inequalities. We want to be in partnership with this government, whichever party forms government, to continue the progress we've been making since the 1960s.

Thank you.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Madam Chair, do I have more time?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Is there anything, Mr. Jensen, that you want to add to that?

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I love my fellow witness's suggestion that politicians don't speak about our communities. We could all just take a pause for 18 months or something, come back and have lower-temperature conversations.

I just think of what Mr. Lamrock shared and my experience with the young people in New Brunswick. It was horrifying to have their identities in the headlines for month after month. Nothing brought them greater peace than just having that shift.

We had local organizations begging the leaders, even favourable leaders, before the election in New Brunswick, to not talk about their communities because it was just so devastating to have their humanity politicized. No good can come of it.

I echo the comments that this conversation today has been really lovely. I feel like there is a lot of productive dialogue. That just isn't possible, normally, in headlines.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I think that at the outset, it was said, "please leave us alone".

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** Yes, with respect.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We have 10 minutes. We could go on. We could spend another hour.

What I'm going to do is truncate the members' time. We'll do three, three, two and two.

Michelle, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll tell you, the Conservative line is "leave me alone". That's very much who we are at our core. Don't tell me what to do. Don't tell me who to worship. Don't touch my stuff.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** It's that simple.

I want to go back to something.

Thank you for bringing up the homelessness issue because I know that in my shelter... I did want to talk about that.

However, I want to get to this first. I think it can be very valuable in recommendations for this study. We have a Conservative member right now who has Bill C-412. It's in juxtaposition to Bill C-63.

In Bill C-63, the big push-back is that it's a regulator. It's another body—another government bureaucracy—that would then have to enforce what happens with the social media platforms. Bill C-412 removes that regulator and puts the duty of care or the responsibility directly on the social media platforms. It could be implemented immediately.

The big thing that I really value about Bill C-412 is that if there is an anonymous person online spreading hate or threatening somebody, the judge would then have to release that name, based on the algorithms and the social media's responsibility or duty of care.

The specific difference is that Bill C-63 would create a regulator, which to me is another arm's-length organization or another task force. We're going to have a meeting about a meeting, whereas in the Conservative Bill C-412, it is immediate. It gives the duty of care directly to the social media platforms.

Could we have you on record supporting a bill like that today in this committee to ensure that we can have stronger legislation, so that judges have more power to ensure that we know who's hiding behind these screens and hurting people?

Go ahead, Mr. Jensen.

• (1250)

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I apologize, Madam Chair, because this is going to be a very lawyerly answer. I, unfortunately, cannot commit to anything without having reviewed it myself.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** That is totally fair.

What I would say is that if you would review those two, I would love to hear back from you. I think you will find far more effective implementation in Bill C-412 than in Bill C-63.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I will review them.

Thank you.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you so much.

I have 30 seconds.

Fae, did you want to comment on that?

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I have not reviewed the private member's bill in question.

I would just say that I worry when we have social media platforms owned by folks. Saying the word "cisgender" on Twitter is considered part of a slur. It's censored on that platform.

I do think rigorous engagement with those platforms is integral, but I don't particularly care about the detail. I just know it's a crisis we need to address.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Exactly.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Pam, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thanks, Chair.

This was the question I didn't have time to ask. I'm sorry that Mr. Lamrock isn't here right now, but—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I'm going to interrupt quickly, Pam.

I was to acknowledge that Mr. Lamrock had to leave for an emergency. I just wanted to throw that out there.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** In May 2024, the Canadian Journal of Public Health used the term TGE, which is trans and gender expansive. They said, "Research has consistently shown that TGE individuals experience significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety, as well as suicide ideation and attempts, compared to their cisgender peers." There's nothing new there, but they go on to say, "For TGE youth who lack parental support, a strong connection to supportive adult figures outside the home, such as teachers or health care providers, can help offset some of the negative health effects of minority stress." We've talked about that a little bit.

When we see provinces restricting these kids from being able to speak to a supportive adult, as one of you said, what happens to these kids? How important is it for probably the minority of kids, who don't have support at home, to have access to that support at school?

I'll start with you, Mr. Jensen, and we can just go across.

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** Quite simply, it can be life or death. Again, I'm not being dramatic in my language.

I also want to quickly address what you said about the higher rates of depression and mental health issues. This is going back to something that has come up. There is nothing inherently wrong with being trans, of course, but if you're a parent, you're given the impression that someone is pressuring your child to become trans, and all you know about being trans is that it's associated with higher rates of suicidality, higher rates of homelessness. No kidding, you'll be scared.

This is why taking the temperature down is so important, because that isn't what's happening, but if you think that's what's happening, that is legitimately terrifying.

Yes, we know that it can be life or death, because, of course, forcing someone to stay closeted is what causes those mental health crises and can lead them to feel sufficiently hopeless that they choose to end their life.

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** I can answer quickly.

I grew up in Morocco, where there is no education, nothing on this in school. My parents were not exposed to this. It was painful growing up and being confused for so long. Even when I came to understand a bit about what it was, it was the Internet where I had to go, which was not very helpful.

I don't want that on any of these kids, because this is what Canada is about. We educate our kids, so they are prepared for the future.

• (1255)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** You have about 15 seconds.

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** I would just echo that it's about having supportive families, healthy kids—let's get back to that. Let's remember that, again, it's not an either-or; it's a both, and that is the best path forward in the best interests of kids and families.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Pam.

MP Larouche, you have the floor for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Once again, thank you to the three witnesses for being here with us.

I'd like to ask an open-ended question, which is for all three witnesses.

What I'm hearing and understanding today is that people have lost confidence in the justice system because they don't have the necessary tools to file a proper complaint. People also lose confidence when they don't feel heard and there's no justice in their workplace.

We also talked about the lack of an online tool for police officers to intervene. What can be said behind a screen is not given enough weight.

We also spoke about the need for help and support when it comes to health, particularly mental health. People aren't sure that the system understands the problems they're experiencing. I met with people at the Vivago clinic in Montreal, who are trying to alleviate health problems that are specific to community members.

How do you see the problem related to the loss of trust? What can we do to restore people's confidence?

Should there be better training for workers in the justice and education systems or for people working in health care?

[*English*]

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** Briefly, I would just acknowledge that we have a long history of our communities being mistreated in these spaces, by health and social services to education institutions and workplaces.

Doing the everyday work of showing inclusion, showing acceptance and building that trust with us really is the path forward, because too many of us don't access services, because we don't feel safe doing so, which exacerbates all of the health and social inequalities we already experience.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Naoufel Testaouni:** To some extent, the companies we work with, where these problems are more visible, are a reflection of our society.

We must continue to provide very clear processes so that people can report these kinds of problems.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bennett Jensen:** I would look to the lessons that can be learned from the intimate partner violence reality. It requires psychosocial supports and deep training across law enforcement. Similar barriers exist in accessing support, so I would look to that experience for examples.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gazan, you have the floor for two minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

I learned a lot today, especially how to be a better ally. I have deep level concern, and so thank you for teaching me how to be a better ally.

I have something to say, and I don't know if I'm going to say it properly, but I want to turn it around. I've been using the term “sys-

tems at risk” instead of talking about “kids at risk”, in terms of the former's not looking after a population. I say that because we always place the onus on the wounded or somebody who's not perfect or not what they're supposed to be on that person, instead of the problem with the system. Indigenous people face that. We're called “indigenous issues”. Well, I don't think I'm “an issue”. Maybe my colleagues would disagree—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** —but they often talk about indigenous issues.

How can we change that language so it's empowered language instead of looking at, for example, trans folks as inherently a problem? I find the language around trans folks very pathologizing.

**Ms. Fae Johnstone:** Thank you for the question.

I would first say that I think we can benefit by coming back to shared values. I believe in freedom. I believe in equality. I believe in human rights. By centering on that, I think we can build a foundation that brings everyone together, whether you're queer, trans or straight, or whether you're from a small town or a big city.

Second, what I would say is that perhaps we need a broader invitation to continue this dialogue. I think that we need to set the vitriol aside, and we can solve these problems when we don't make them political issues but issues about what kind of country we want to be. We have been on a journey to address this legacy of discrimination against so many communities. It's not going to be easy, but let's do the work to keep on having that conversation and finding solutions for all Canadians.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That does conclude our panel for today and, on behalf of the entire committee, I would like to thank you for your extremely sensitive and poignant testimony.

Before members head out, there's one last item to cover.

With regard to witness lists for the study of the institutional mother-child program, we need to submit lists to the clerk. The motion already contains 10 names; however, it's best to submit the names of other witnesses before we leave for the Christmas break. Is December 13 acceptable for additional witnesses?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Seeing no questions, the meeting is adjourned.







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