

# Family Education Trust

(Family and Youth Concern)

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## **Government must abandon plans to impose discriminatory regulations, says family group.**

*New sexual orientation laws need to show more respect for freedom of conscience.*

**Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Monday 11 December 2006**

As the transitional Northern Ireland Assembly prepares to debate a motion on the sexual orientation regulations at Stormont today, the Family Education Trust is calling on the government to abandon its plans to impose the controversial new laws on the people of the Province without proper public debate.

According to the Trust, in their present form the regulations will do nothing to advance the cause of equality, but will discriminate against those who believe that homosexual activity is morally wrong. In some cases, they could force people out of business or out of their profession if they refuse to act against their consciences.

The Trust's Director, Norman Wells, commented:

*'It is precisely because we support the government's vision for a society where there is "respect for the dignity and worth of each person", that we oppose the undemocratic imposition of these regulations. As drafted, the regulations show a lack of respect for the dignity of those who cannot in good conscience condone or promote homosexual activity in any way, and they are bound to lead to unnecessary and damaging legal proceedings.*

*'The regulations imply that moral opposition to homosexual activity represents a failure to respect those who experience same-sex attraction when, in reality, it is perfectly possible to show respect for the dignity and worth of individuals who are attracted to another person of the same sex without wishing to give the appearance of condoning, approving or advocating homosexual practices.*

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Trustees: Arthur Cornell MEd F.Coll.P (Chairman); Betty, Lady Grantchester; Eric Hester BA (Vice Chairman)  
Dr John Guly MB BS DMJ; Simon J Ling MA FCA (Hon Treasurer); Denis Riches BSc (Secretary);  
Mrs Valerie Riches (Founder President); Dr Trevor Stammers BSc FRCGP; Robert Whelan MA

Sponsors: John Bonnar MA MD FRCOG; The Viscountess Brentford OBE; Peter Dawson OBE BSc FRSA; The Baroness Elles;  
The Duke of Montrose; The Baroness O'Cathain OBE; Professor Dennis O'Keefe; J S Scott MD FRCS FRCOG

*'In fact, many people hold the view that because homosexual conduct goes against the created order, standing against it shows greater respect for the dignity and worth of the individual than supporting it does.'*

In formulating the regulations, the government has failed to recognise any difference between homosexual *orientation* and homosexual *activity*. Yet the distinction is crucial.

Most transactions in the provision of goods and services do not involve the provider in condoning a customer's lifestyle. The sexual orientation of a customer is completely irrelevant to the shop assistant selling clothing, furniture or food; or to the car mechanic servicing a vehicle, for example. However, in other contexts, the provision of a service may involve the provider in condoning or promoting a lifestyle that fundamentally conflicts with his or her beliefs about marriage and family life.

For example, under the regulations, a caterer, photographer, chauffeur, or printer who is opposed to homosexual activity could be sued for refusing to provide the same service to a same-sex couple entering a civil partnership that he or she offers to heterosexual couples getting married. Or a non-religious family support organisation that upholds a traditional view marriage could be legally obliged to make its premises available for a reception after a civil partnership ceremony, or for a public meeting hosted by a homosexual rights group.

Norman Wells observed:

*'Concerns about the imposition of a social acceptance of homosexual activity by force of law are not limited to followers of a religious faith. When you see the decline in the nation's sexual health that has accompanied the growth in homosexual practice and of pre- and extra-marital heterosexual relationships in recent years, it is difficult to share the government's optimism that the introduction of these regulations will have "a positive impact on health". These concerns don't arise from prejudice and bigotry, but rather from a genuine conviction as to what is in the best interests of individuals and society.'*

*'It is all too easy to dismiss those who object to the regulations as "homophobic", but that is to fail to appreciate the extent of the deep unease felt by many individuals and groups'*

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*about the sexual revolution and its impact on the health of individuals and society. We are not aware of any society in history that has sought to place same-sex relationships on an equal footing with heterosexual marriage. There are widespread concerns about the social costs that could arise as a result of plotting a course into uncharted waters. While 'homophobia' represents an irrational fear of homosexuals, the fears that are shared by so many in our society when they see the government embarking on a course without historical precedent are entirely rational and not at all unreasonable.*

*'The bottom line is that if we are to have a free society that values the dignity and worth of every member of the community and which cherishes diversity and liberty of conscience, we need to show proper respect for the sensitivities of those who cannot with a clear conscience do anything that would involve condoning or promoting a homosexual lifestyle.'*

## **Notes to Editors**

The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 are due to come into force on 1 January 2007.

In response to a Parliamentary Question from Lady Hermon last week, David Hanson, Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office declined to entertain a request to delay the implementation of the regulations to allow further consultation (Hansard, 4 December 2006, col 90-91W).

Today's debate in the transitional Northern Ireland Assembly will add to the mounting pressure being placed on the government to allow full consideration of the regulations prior to implementation.

Family Education Trust is an educational charity committed to promoting stable family life and the welfare of children and young people. It operates throughout the UK and has an active branch in Northern Ireland.

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