



By email from: florence@equality-network.org

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice
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Kaukab Stewart MSP
Minister for Equalities
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Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
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10th May 2024

Dear Shirley-Anne & Kaukab,

We are writing on behalf of everyone at Equality Network and Scottish Trans to congratulate you on your appointments as Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Minister for Equalities. As an organisation that represents and pushes for the realisation of rights, equality and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ people in Scotland, we are looking forward to working with you to effect positive change and ensure that Scotland is a safe and welcoming place for all in our community, particularly those who are multiply marginalised.

In Scotland attacks on our right to be ourselves, including via politicians and media, are worsening week by week. Legislation or policy changes intended to help us live our lives more safely and securely are often misrepresented or misconstrued as a threat to the rights of others.

It feels increasingly unsafe to be open about who we are, or to access public services and spaces without fear of how we will be treated. We fear that fundamental parts of our identity will not be respected, or worse. These concerns are even more acute for disabled LGBTQIA+ people and LGBTQIA+ People of Colour.

There is a long way to go, and we must ensure that our hard-won rights are not rolled back or diminished by populist narratives. LGBTQIA+ people are amongst the ordinary people of Scotland, and the actions needed to improve our lives are part of the delivery and development of a fair and just Scotland for everyone. We need the Government to be champions of marginalised people and to aid the wider public in understanding why policy and legislation that helps our community is part of building a society in which everyone has full and equal access to their rights. Rights for one group are not diminished by improvements for another.

We sincerely hope that you and your government will work with us to address some of the significant issues that face our community today, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss some of these issues.

These issues include:

Standing up for trans rights: While our whole community faces significant barriers to living equally and freely, trans and non-binary people are the primary targets for those who wish to diminish our rights and participation in public life.

When most of what is said about trans and non-binary people is based on misinformation and prejudice, we need politicians who will stand up for our community and speak to the importance of our inclusion in a diverse and modern Scotland, rather than use us as a 'political football'. At a time when many trans and non-binary people are feeling worried and scared about the future, strong leadership is essential to put us back on course to making Scotland a safe place for everyone.

Competent healthcare: Trans and non-binary people still do not have timely access to high-quality gender affirming healthcare, and poor mental health across the LGBTQIA+ community is becoming more and more common without mental health services that can meet our needs. LGBTQIA+ people still face barriers to accessing healthcare in Scotland because of who we are.

Conversion practices: We were glad to see the consultation on the Scottish Government's proposals for legislation to end conversion practices earlier this year. We know that these harmful and abhorrent practices are still happening in Scotland, so we would welcome more information on when a Bill is expected to be introduced to Parliament.

As we [covered in detail in our response to the consultation](#), we have several questions about the proposals, and suggestions for how the Bill can be improved to ensure this legislation ends conversion practices in Scotland. The previous promise of a Bill being introduced before the end of 2023 was not met, and survivors and those at risk of conversion practices need clarity that this government will prioritise their safety and wellbeing.

Human rights incorporation: As LGBTQIA+ people are not explicitly mentioned within any of the four treaties proposed for incorporation into Scots law, we are calling for a comprehensive Bill that enshrines in legislation LGBTQIA+ people's rights, not only with regards to their economic, social and cultural rights, but intersectionally within the rights afforded by the UN CRPD, CERD and CEDAW.

Supporting refugees and asylum seekers: We note that the previous Ministerial role included refugees and migration in the title. We very much hope that given that the current situation for refugees in Scotland is extraordinarily challenging, that this change does not reflect a reduction in the Scottish Government's commitment to take all the actions it can within its devolved powers to improve the situation of refugees. We are deeply concerned about the UK Government's abhorrent "Rwanda Plan" and what those seeking asylum in Scotland may face if they are deported to

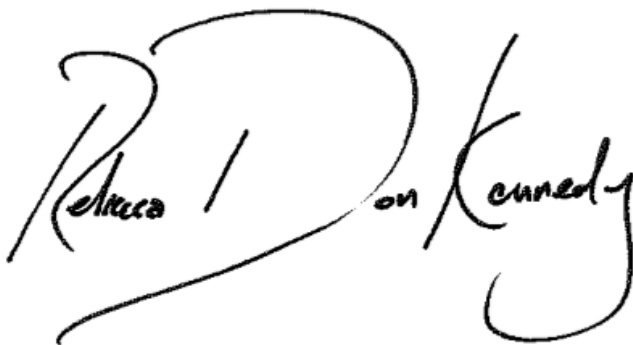
Rwanda. We don't think that anyone who has arrived in Scotland or the UK fleeing persecution should be deported to a country where they may not be safe. LGBTQIA+ refugees are also likely to face particular danger due to Rwanda's abysmal track record on the treatment and rights of LGBTQIA+ people.

While we understand that immigration is reserved, it is vital that the Scottish Government does everything in its power to ensure the safety of all migrants in Scotland and provides funding for appropriate and specialist services and support. Likewise, work to ensure that new Scots know that they are an important part of this country is vital at a time when anti-refugee and anti-migrant rhetoric is increasing.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you both, either on our own, or alongside the other Scottish LGBTQIA+ organisations who we work closely with as a sector.

By working together, we believe that we can improve outcomes for LGBTQIA+ people in Scotland and make this a place where everyone, no matter who they love, who they are, or where they are from, can flourish and thrive.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca / Don Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R' and 'D'.

Dr Rebecca Don Kennedy, CEO, Equality Network

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vic Valentine". The signature is bold and cursive, with a large initial 'V'.

Vic Valentine, Manager, Scottish Trans

And everyone at Equality Network and Scottish Trans.