

Bethel comes out against LGBT bills pending in state Legislature

[Amber Sandhu](#), [Record Searchlight](#) Published 5:30 p.m. PT March 27, 2018 | Updated 10:07 a.m. PT March 28, 2018



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A package of California bills that guarantee access to health care for the LGBT community and crack down on conversion therapy are being considered by California lawmakers.

In Redding, members of NorCal OUTreach Project, a nonprofit that advocates for the LGBT community, said the three bills are a step in the right direction.

“California is stepping up and making it into a law so that people are protected,” said Aiden Mares, a support group leader at NorCal OUTreach.

Conversion therapy, which aims to convert a homosexual person into heterosexuality, has not been without controversy. In October 2015, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration published a report concluding that being a “sexual or gender minority, or identifying as LGBTQ, is not a mental disorder” and that interventions could be harmful and inappropriate.

But, over the weekend, Bethel Church's senior associate leader Kris Vallotton tweeted about the church's position on the three bills.

"If you have come out of homosexuality & live in California it's incredibly important that you send an email or call the legislatures outlining your path out of homosexuality," Vallotton tweeted on March 24. He called the stack of bills three "significant and distressing pieces of legislation" with a link to Bethel Church's statement.

The church stated that if the bills pass, it would be "illegal for anyone to sell resources that offer treatment or ministry in order to reduce or eliminate same sex attraction or gender dysphoria." The church would not be able to provide counseling, teaching or books for people willing to pay for it.

The post also stated it was an "uncommon step" the church was taking by "broadcasting" its concern and encouraging the community to contact state legislators.

But while churches and other religious organizations face some restrictions on participating in politics under the Johnson Amendment, such grassroots lobbying on issues is allowable, according to Alan Brownstein, emeritus professor of law at the University of California at Davis.

Churches have always taken part in lobbying, and to violate the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits charities and churches from participating in political campaigns, Bethel would have to put forward a substantial amount of resources and time that goes beyond an email or a tweet, to violate the Johnson Amendment.

"You may disagree with them," Brownstein said. "But, this happens all the time."

Brownstein pointed to many other movements churches have supported such as the civil rights movement, gun control and sanctuary cities.

"Religious organizations have been at the forefront of a lot of movements," he said.

In this case, Vallotton's tweet helped build momentum.

According to Simon Watson, an office assistant at Assemblyman Brian Dahle's office, the calls began Friday, and a few constituents walked in on Monday and Tuesday to the office to voice their opposition to the bill. He said most people called after they were notified through the Bethel Church.

Mares, on the other hand, said he's optimistic that the three bills would pass. He said the organization has nothing against Bethel Church, but he encourages people to do their research on conversion therapy.

"Conversion therapy is wildly crazy and disproven," he said. "This is a no-brainer."

The bills are AB 1779, AB 2943, and AB 2119.