

Highlander news



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MP holds vote on conversion therapy bill

By Joseph Quigley
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock MP Jamie Schmale is holding his fourth constituency referendum, this time to decide his vote on criminalizing conversion therapy.

Schmale has sent out a mailer asking constituents to weigh in on Bill C-6, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy). The bill seeks to criminalize the practice of conversion therapy – forced counselling to change a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It passed second reading last fall, with Schmale voting in favour. A third and final reading is to come.

Schmale said he morally opposes the practice. But he said he is fulfilling a 2015 pledge to hold referendums, when time allows, whenever his Conservative party allows a free vote.

“We do need to deal with conversion therapy. It should have been done many, many years ago,” Schmale said. He added the original draft had issues that could have impacted free speech.

“I haven’t met one person who has told me they agree with it. The question was, ‘are you okay with me voting in favour of criminalizing conversation therapy, at the same time, we’re also limiting the ability of free speech?’”

Schmale’s mailer included a caveat,

where he would oppose Bill C-6 regardless of the referendum if it was not amended. Schmale said he was concerned about the bill potentially criminalizing voluntary, good-faith conversations on gender and sexual identity between individuals and teachers, counsellors, faith leaders, medical professionals, family and beyond. Schmale said the bill has since been updated to address that concern and the bill’s text is fine now.

But the referendum has garnered some controversy. Minden Pride has asked people to participate. Chair Allan Guinan said the organization had a positive meeting with Schmale for more clarity, but they questioned the need for a public vote.

“He should be voting in favour of the bill regardless of the outcome,” Guinan said. “From our perspective, more harm is done if the bill is not passed.

“We all feel this is really, ultimately a human rights issue and we know this has been a traumatizing concept to our community,” Guinan later added. “The suggestion LGBTQ+ people need to be changed is quite frankly insulting.”

“These are very difficult conversations. In no way did I mean to damage or retraumatize or hurt people within the community,” Schmale said. “But I also needed to live up to my promise.”

Schmale said he has done that with every free vote so far, except for a bill to amend the national anthem in 2018, which he said



MP Jamie Schmale is holding a constituency referendum on a bill to criminalize conversion therapy. *File photo.*

moved too quickly for a public vote. His most recent referendum was on Bill C-7, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Medical Assistance in Dying). He announced Dec. 10 that 65 per cent of respondents voted in favour.

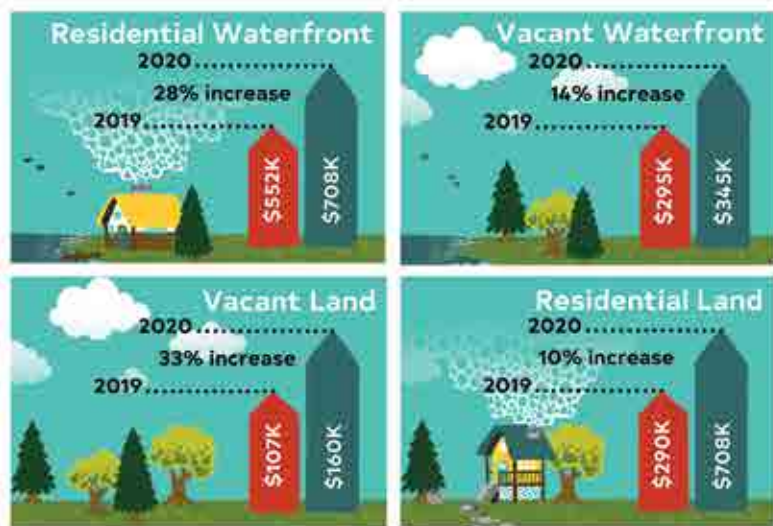
“People do want to have a say,” Schmale said. “Any legislator - regardless of the level - should be doing their job, which is consulting their constituents.”

“We recognize we live in a diverse community, so there are going to be people who have opinions on both sides of the argument,” Guinan said. “We’re hopeful people see this as a good decision to be made relative to the human rights of everyone in Canada.”

Instructions on voting in the referendum are available at jamieschmale.ca/billc-6.

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*above is based on the Lakelands Board statistics

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