

Trans

LGBTQ+ advocates shocked by Equality Act reforms debate: 'Distressing and infuriating'

Jun 13 • Written by Sophie Perry

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Concerns have been expressed after a debate over reforms to the Equality Act saw MPs push anti-trans views (Vincenzo Nuzzolese/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

Charities, activists and politicians have expressed deep concern and disappointment after a Westminster debate

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over the definition of “sex” found in the 2010 Equality Act saw MPs clash, resort to negative stereotypes about trans people and push misinformation.

The debate on Monday evening (11 June) saw politicians discuss **two different petitions**, one of which called for the category of “sex” – as it’s defined in the Equality Act – to be changed to mean “biological sex”, while the other opposed any amendment.

The petition **calling for changes** received 109,463 signatures by the end of its run while the one urging the government **not to update** the definition amassed 138,886.

The debate comes as the government **considers** changing the definition, following advice from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which suggested such changes could offer “greater legal clarity”.

However, the EHRC did note that any amendment has the potential to negatively affect trans people, with one activist describing the situation as “driven by political desire and manufactured fear, more than any systematic evidence”.

During the debate, MPs butted heads over trans rights and women’s rights as mutually exclusive concepts, as well as going back and forth over single-sex spaces, gender-affirming care, female sports and even pushing bizarre suggestions about what it is to be trans.

At one point, Nick Fletcher, the Tory MP for Don Valley, in South Yorkshire, put forth a hypothetical situation where he claimed a trans man would wake up at the age of 25 with “no friends”, simply for being trans.

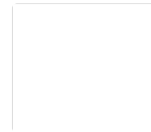
Later in the debate, Joanna Cherry, the Scottish National Party MP for Edinburgh South West said aloud “what rubbish” when fellow SNP MP Kirsty Blackman quoted a trans constituent’s experiences of suicidal ideation.



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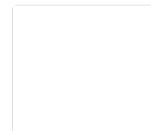
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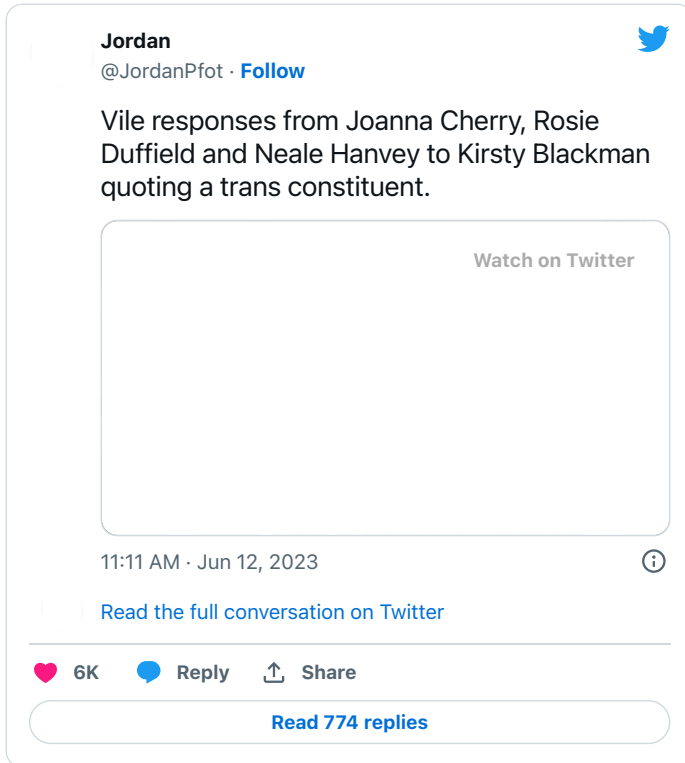


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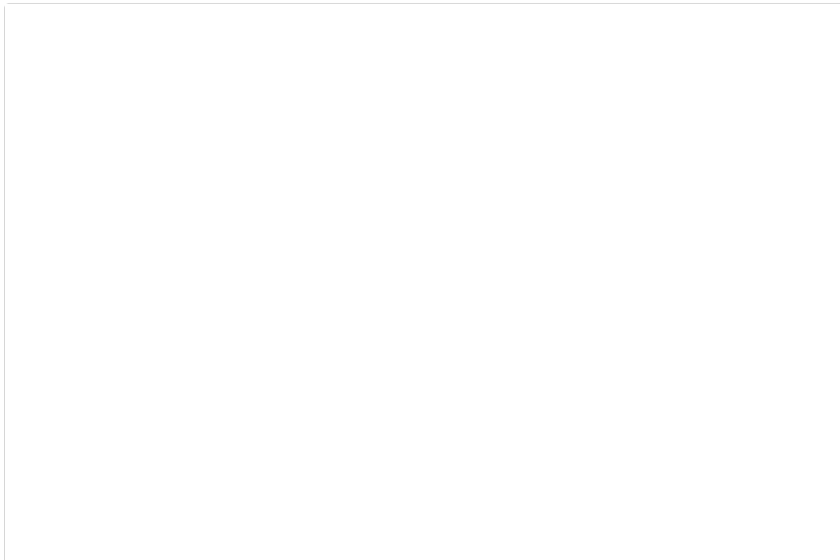
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Conservative Jamie Wallis, the first out trans MP in Westminster, left the chamber during the debate and did not return. The following day, he told PinkNews that he was “shocked and saddened” by the tone of the discussions.

“It is important to have an open discussion on this topic,” he said. “However, this morning, I find myself genuinely baffled as to how Members of Parliament could say out loud that they wish to have a respectful debate, then to go on and induce it to deteriorate in such a manner.”



Trans MP Jamie Wallis. (JUSTIN TALLIS/AFP via Getty Images)

The MP for Bridgend, in South Wales added: “I’m thankful to those colleagues who chose to be courteous and sensitive, especially those who

disagree with me on the issue, and I look forward to working with them and colleagues across the house as we focus on trying to convince decision-makers.”

Wallis’ view was echoed by the chairwoman of TransActual, Helen Belcher, who called the debate “absolutely shocking”.

She told PinkNews: “Most of the arguments opposing trans inclusion relied on tired and debunked ideas, with no basis in science. The lack of humanity being displayed from those promoting those arguments was absolutely shocking.”

Belcher added: “It was encouraging to see the relentless negative framing around trans people challenged. However, it’s clear there’s still an awful lot of work needed to undo the damage of the government’s messaging and the media onslaught of the past few years.”

Eva Echo, an activist and public speaker, said the debate itself around reforming the legislation has been brought about by “misinformation, lies and hate”, which she says is a “direct result years of a one-sided argument created by a minority”.

She added: “Evidence and studies have been completely ignored in favour of furthering divide which has now resulted in a debate which could see trans people having vital protections removed. Doing so would also invalidate gender-recognition certificates obtained under the Gender Recognition Act, taking the UK backwards during a time when other countries are moving forward with inclusion.”

‘Trans people deserve better’

A spokesperson for Mermaids, the trans youth charity, told PinkNews: “It’s extremely distressing and infuriating to see politicians continually debate the very existence of trans people which, inevitably, is fuelling the increasingly hostile environment that trans people are forced to contend with in our every-day lives.

“In seeking to redefine sex to mean biological sex, the government risks removing hard-won rights and protections for trans people after decades of discrimination and marginalisation. Trans people deserve better from their representatives than the falsehoods and hatred expressed in Westminster last night.”

Robbie de Santos, Director of External Affairs at Stonewall, said: “We applaud the MPs who passionately defended our world-class Equality Act, which protects trans people from discrimination.

“MPs from across the parties shared powerful speeches and stories from their constituents, emphasising their need for support and freedom.

“Many argued eloquently that restricting trans rights would be unworkable, unnecessary, and unfair.

de Santos added: “It was disappointing to see some MPs repeating sensationalist tropes about trans people, directly imported from American far-right groups, who have been pushing a wider rollback on LGBTQ+

rights in the USA.

“Policymakers should guard against populist attempts to use trans people as a political football, and ensure that policy debate is respectful and led by evidence.”

LGBTQ+ activist Peter Tatchell said in a statement issued to PinkNews that biological sex is a reality but so is gender identity, both of which are “equally valid and deserving of respect and rights”.

The veteran campaigner added: “Pitching one against the other aids only misogynists and transphobes. We must respect difference and stand together against prejudice, discrimination and hate crime, which damages the lives of all women, trans and non-trans.

“This toxic debate was clearly designed to undermine trans identity and exclude trans people from the protections of the Equality Act. We must resist those attempts. They would damage the mental and physical well-being of the trans community.”



Taking to Twitter following the debate, gay Christian, former government adviser and conversion therapy survivor **Jayne Ozanne** wrote: “For all the excellent speeches made by MPs tonight, I was appalled by the very high levels of ignorance, rudeness and unconscious bias shown by some.

“It was telling from whom all the heckling and interruptions were coming, sadly.”

Meanwhile, Nancy Kelley, the chief executive of Stonewall, also took to

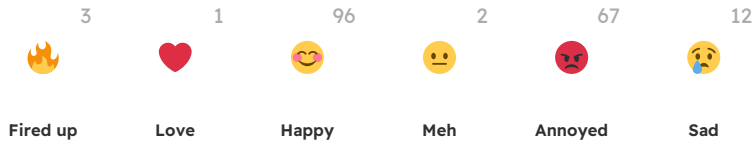
Twitter where she decried the lack of trans voices in the debating chamber, saying it is a “failure of our democracy” that there is only one trans MP.

“When the disability rights movement said: ‘Nothing about us without us’, they said it for a bl**dy good reason,” she wrote.

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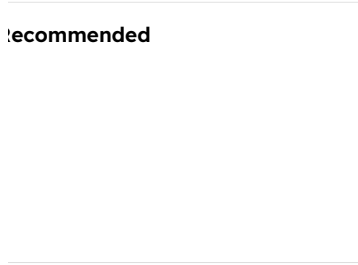
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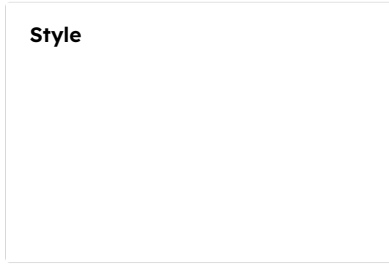




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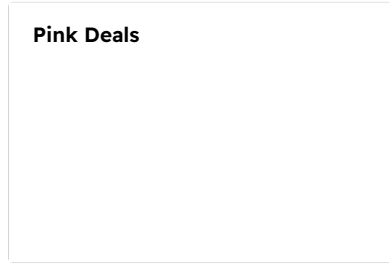
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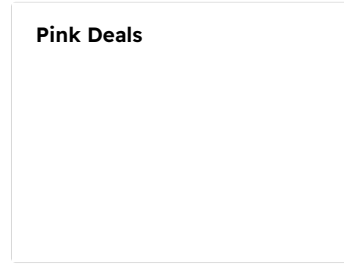
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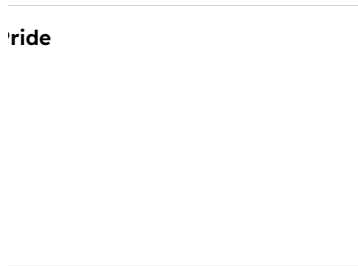
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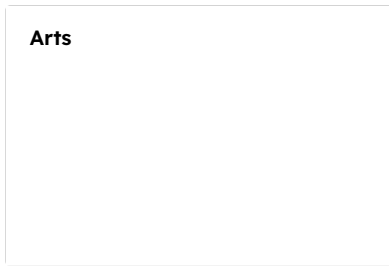
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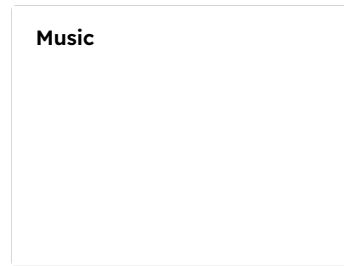
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