

**INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT METHODS AND IMPACTS OF
CULTS AND ORGANISED FRINGE GROUPS**

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Submission to the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups

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Executive Summary

This submission details my experience as a survivor of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, documenting their systematic recruitment methods, coercive control tactics, and the severe psychological, social, and financial harm they inflicted over four decades of my life. As a gay man who was born into the organization, baptized at age 13, and served as an elder for 17 years before escaping at age 42, I provide specific testimony about how cults target vulnerable populations, isolate members from society, suppress education and critical thinking, and use shunning as a weapon of control. My experience demonstrates the urgent need for legal protections against cult abuse, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals and children who cannot consent to lifelong commitments that trap them in harmful systems.

Background and Recruitment

I was born into the Jehovah's Witnesses organization in 1979. My parents were recruited in 1972 shortly after losing my older brother [REDACTED], when they were young, uneducated, and financially struggling. The JWs recruited them during their most vulnerable moment by promising they would see their deceased son again in "Paradise Earth" after Armageddon. This promise of resurrection exploited their grief and gave them false hope while simultaneously providing them with a structured belief system that became their substitute for formal education.

This recruitment pattern - targeting people during times of emotional distress, financial hardship, or identity crisis - is a classic cult tactic that I witnessed repeatedly throughout my childhood and adult life within the organization.

Systematic Control and Isolation From Childhood

Social Isolation and Fear-Based Control

From birth, I was subjected to systematic isolation designed to prevent normal social development:

- **Mandatory attendance** at three meetings per week plus weekend "field service" (door-to-door recruitment)
- **Prohibition of friendships** with "worldly" people (anyone outside the organization)
- **Exclusion from normal childhood experiences:** No birthday celebrations, holidays, school parties, or extracurricular activities deemed "pagan"
- **Forced religious displays** at school: Required to refuse flag salute and national anthem, creating social ostracism
- **Constant fear indoctrination:** Taught that all my classmates would be destroyed at Armageddon, which could happen "at any time"

The psychological pressure was so intense that I once fainted at school. I lived in constant fear of getting too close to classmates because I believed they could influence me to "lose faith" and cause Jehovah to destroy me at Armageddon.

This isolation severely impacted my social development. I struggle with adult ADHD and difficulty forming relationships or remembering people's names - issues I directly attribute to being prevented from developing normal social skills during critical childhood years.

Educational Sabotage and Future Planning Prevention

The organization systematically discouraged education and future planning through constant messaging that "we are living in the last days of this system of things." Members were told:

- Higher education was unnecessary because Armageddon was imminent
- Saving for the future was pointless because Jehovah would destroy everything
- College was dangerous because it involved "Satan's world"
- Pursuing career advancement could cost you "privileges" within the organization

Despite being an honor roll student every month who loved learning, I had to keep my academic success secret to avoid being discouraged or targeted. I was fortunate to attend a technical school in Mexico and graduate with a degree in Information Sciences at age 17, but I was denied the opportunity to pursue higher education in college.

This educational sabotage has had lasting financial impacts. I believe I would have had a much more rewarding career path if I had been allowed to pursue a proper college degree. Instead,

I've had to work extra hard, including sleepless nights, to reach my current position as [REDACTED]

Deep Investment and Leadership Within the Organization

Despite the psychological harm I was experiencing, I became deeply invested in the organization and held significant leadership positions:

- **Baptized at age 13:** I was baptized as a child, making a lifetime commitment I could not possibly understand. Tragically, I believed baptism might help me "stop being gay" - demonstrating how their anti-LGBTQ+ messaging had convinced me my sexual orientation was something wrong that needed to be fixed.
- **Regular Pioneer:** I served as a regular pioneer (full-time preacher) for two years, dedicating my life to recruiting others into the same system that was psychologically torturing me.
- **Ministerial Servant at 19:** I was appointed as a ministerial servant, taking on organizational responsibilities and supporting the very system that denied my authentic self.
- **Elder for 17 years:** From age 26 until I left at 42, I served as an elder - one of the highest positions in the organization. I spent 17 years enforcing the same rules and doctrines that were destroying my mental health and preventing me from living authentically.

This deep investment makes my eventual departure all the more significant. I was not a peripheral member who could easily dismiss the organization's teachings - I was a leader who had dedicated my entire adult life to their system. The fact that someone so committed eventually recognized the organization's destructive nature speaks to the severity of their abusive practices.

The irony is profound: while serving as an elder, I was simultaneously being psychologically tortured by the very doctrines I was expected to teach and enforce. This created an impossible internal conflict that contributed significantly to my mental health struggles.

Specific Persecution of LGBTQ+ Members

Demonization and Dehumanization

The Jehovah's Witnesses organization teaches that LGBTQ+ people are influenced by Satan. Throughout my childhood and adult life, I was subjected to:

- **Hateful speeches** at meetings and conventions that demonized the LGBTQ+ community
- **Messaging that homosexuality was "a phase"** that would pass during adolescence
- **Requirements for lifelong celibacy** or marriage to someone of the opposite sex
- **Complete rejection** of LGBTQ+ identity as spiritually acceptable

Psychological Torture and Suicidal Ideation

These teachings created severe psychological distress that led to multiple episodes of suicidal ideation. I spent years believing I would "die alone" because I could never have the family life I saw my peers building. The psychological torture of trying to appear straight consumed enormous time and energy, severely impacting my wellbeing.

I internalized their messaging to the point where I felt guilt simply for being who I was. The fear of being discovered as gay made me feel constantly unsafe within my own community and family.

Isolation from Support Networks

The organization's prohibition against forming friendships with "worldly" people meant I had no access to LGBTQ+ support networks, validation, or community during my formative years. I was completely isolated from anyone who could have helped me understand that my sexual orientation was natural and acceptable.

This isolation delayed my coming out until age 42, stealing decades of authentic life and the opportunity to form a family earlier in life.

Information Control and Punishment System

The organization maintains strict information control through:

- **Prohibition against accessing "apostate" information** - questioning doctrine or researching outside sources could result in disfellowshipping
- **Surveillance system** where members are encouraged to report each other to elders for perceived wrongdoing
- **Conditional relationships** where love and acceptance depend entirely on compliance with organizational demands

The moment you disagree with the organization, all relationships within it cease to exist. This creates a prison-like environment where the cost of questioning or leaving is the loss of everyone you've ever loved.

Family Destruction Through Shunning

Attempts at Dialogue and Escalating Hostility

When I began questioning the organization and came out to my family, I initially tried respectful dialogue. I explained what I was learning about the organization's false teachings and tried to negotiate maintaining our relationship while respecting their choice to remain in the religion.

However, as their indoctrination took hold, their response became increasingly hostile. They:

- **Discounted me as a family member** and opposed my relationship with my husband [REDACTED]
- **Were extremely rude** to [REDACTED] when I introduced him after 9 months of long-distance relationship
- **Condemned and shunned** both of us despite living on the same property

Financial Exploitation and Forced Eviction

The situation became untenable when my parents, who lived in a converted mobile home on my property, began shunning [REDACTED] and barely speaking to me while I was paying the mortgage and most expenses. They contributed very little to utilities despite owning a home in Mexico and seven apartment units that provided their income.

When I asked them to treat us with dignity, they refused, claiming "their religion prevents them from doing so." When I pointed out this was simply homophobia, they callously responded, "Well then we are homophobic."

I was forced to ask them to leave my own property. They fought me, and I had to go through the courts to have my own parents evicted. We have been no-contact for three years to protect my marriage and peace of mind.

Extended Family Loss

Because my extended family on my father's side are also Jehovah's Witnesses, I lost contact with all of them. The only family relationships I maintained were with my mother's non-JW relatives, who have been wonderful to [REDACTED] and me. They threw us a wedding banquet and cannot believe how cruel their sister has been to us.

This contrast perfectly illustrates the difference between authentic family love and the conditional "love" offered by the cult.

Ongoing Harassment and Psychological Impact

Stalking and Harassment by Elders

Even after leaving the organization, I was subjected to ongoing harassment:

- **Two elders showed up at my door** uninvited and unannounced
- **Continued phone harassment** despite my clear statements that I wanted no contact
- **Ignored my reports** of the emotional distress they were causing
- **Forced me to write a disassociation letter** to make them stop

This behavior constitutes stalking and harassment that should be criminally prosecuted.

Ongoing Trauma and Recovery Challenges

Three years after leaving, I still experience significant impacts:

- **Hypervigilance:** I scan restaurants and public places for JWs to avoid confrontation
- **Social development delays:** I've had to learn how to make friends at age 42
- **Fear of "worldly" people:** Overcoming decades of programming that taught me to fear non-JW relationships
- **Trust issues:** Difficulty forming professional and personal relationships
- **Financial impacts:** Ongoing consequences of being denied higher education opportunities

I've been working with a therapist to recover my self-esteem and learn that there is nothing wrong with being gay. I attend ex-JW support groups and am slowly learning to build connections with people outside the organization.

Recommendations for Legal and Social Change

Based on my experience, I recommend the following changes to protect others from similar harm:

Legal and Regulatory Changes

1. **Remove tax exemptions** from organizations that practice shunning or other coercive control tactics
2. **Audit religious publications** for discriminatory content and require corrections
3. **Criminalize organized shunning** when it involves harassment, stalking, or child abuse
4. **Protect whistleblowers** who expose cult abuse from retaliation

Child Protection Measures

1. **Prohibit child baptism** or other lifetime commitments that children cannot meaningfully consent to
2. **Mandate reporting** of organizations that discourage education or medical care
3. **Protect children's rights** to normal social development and age-appropriate activities

Mental Health and Support Services

1. **Train healthcare providers** to recognize and treat religious trauma
2. **Fund support services** for people leaving cults, including housing, job training, and counseling
3. **Create specific resources** for LGBTQ+ individuals escaping religious persecution
4. **Educate family courts** about cult dynamics in custody and inheritance cases

Information and Education

1. **Require transparency** in religious recruitment about true beliefs and practices
2. **Mandate disclosure** of shunning policies to potential converts
3. **Educate the public** about cult recruitment tactics and warning signs
4. **Protect access to information** and prohibit organizations from punishing members for research

Conclusion

The Jehovah's Witnesses organization operates as a destructive cult that systematically damages its members through isolation, information control, educational sabotage, and psychological manipulation. Their targeting of vulnerable populations, particularly children and LGBTQ+ individuals, causes severe and lasting harm that extends far beyond religious disagreement.

My story represents thousands of others who have suffered similar abuse. The organization's tax-exempt status, legal protections, and social acceptance provide cover for practices that would be criminal if perpetrated by individuals or secular organizations.

I urge this Committee to recommend strong legal protections against cult abuse, recognizing that religious freedom does not include the right to psychologically torture, isolate, and control other human beings. The harms I've documented are not theological disagreements - they are systematic human rights violations that demand legislative action.

The organization should be required to acknowledge that their beliefs are not "the truth" but simply one belief system among many. They should be held accountable for the discrimination, harassment, and psychological abuse they inflict on members and former members.

Most importantly, children must be protected from being trapped in systems that will punish them with "social suicide" if they ever choose to leave. No child should have to choose between their family and their authentic self.

My marriage to [REDACTED] and my successful career prove that the life the organization told me was impossible - a happy, fulfilling life as an openly gay man - was not only possible but beautiful. Every day of authentic happiness I experience is a victory against their system of control and a testament to the resilience of the human spirit.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story in service of protecting others from similar harm.

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: June 12, 2025