Address to the Preventive Health Policy Division

Remote Meeting, March 2, 2021 (10:30am)

Rev. Chris McArdle, Pastor, First Congregational Church UCC of Anoka, MN

Thank you Chair Freiburg and Committee Members for the opportunity to testify today in support of HF2156. I am the Rev. Chris McArdle, pastor of First Congregational Church in Anoka.

I speak to you today as a cisgender, heterosexual, ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, but I do not profess to speak for the whole of the Church. I speak to you instead on behalf of my congregation which openly welcomes and celebrates LGBTQIA+ persons as full members of the Body of Christ. I do not expect you to vote on this bill, however, based on testimony brought to you by a Christian; I only want you to recognize that the Church is far from monolithic where this subject is concerned.

My education and experience suggest that Christians who support conversion therapy usually do so on a narrow understanding of a handful of brief passages in the Bible that allegedly declare queerness to be a sin. I assure you: every one of these passages is ambiguous in their meaning, and to claim otherwise is to press modern prejudices on to an ancient context that was largely unconcerned by such things. In fact, historians have discovered that the word “homosexual” was *mistakenly* included in the Revised Standard Version in the late 1950s. That mistake had dire consequences.

In my time as a pastor, I have cared for people who have been subjected to conversion therapy, and they universally condemn it. Doctors, therapists, and other health professionals repeatedly tell us that it is destructive. My faith assures me that our diverse sexualities and genders are NOT aberrant.

I have no doubt that you are bombarded with Christian messaging that says the opposite. Indeed, my church has been publicly protested because of our welcoming stance. I urge you to reject prejudice. Embrace the best practices of our health sector. Vote in favor of HF2156 and finally ban the destructive practice of conversion therapy. Thank you for your time.

*For an in-depth analysis of queerness in the ancient world and its Scriptures, I commend to you the book Homoeroticism in the Biblical World by Henri Nissinen (1998: Augsburg Fortress). For quicker reading, the Trevor Project offers a concise perspective on conversion therapy which can be found at* [*https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/guide/so-called-conversion-therapy-and-the-lgbtq-youth-mental-health/*](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/guide/so-called-conversion-therapy-and-the-lgbtq-youth-mental-health/) *.*