

January 13, 2023

Dear Legislators:

On behalf of the Mental Health Legislative Network, a coalition of over 40 mental health related organizations, we are writing to express our support for banning what is called reparative or conversion therapy. Every single major mental health organization - psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, counselors - support a ban on the use of conversion therapy. Even the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration - SAMSHA - issued a report against the use of conversion therapy.

The reason for the opposition to conversion therapy is easy. Therapy is used to treat the symptoms of mental illness such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer is not considered a mental illness, so there is no illness to treat. The idea that same-sex attraction and orientation among some adolescents is in any way abnormal or mentally unhealthy has no support among any mainstream health and mental health professional organizations.

The use of these so-called therapies, particularly on youth, to change their sexual orientation can cause serious potential to harm young people and is viewed by mental health professionals to be dangerous. This is different than working with a therapist to explore one's identity - its purpose is to change it.

Lack of support for youth or rejecting who they are, has a negative impact on their mental health, including leading to depression, anxiety, substance use disorder and suicide. Conversion therapy amplifies the shame and stigma so many LGBTQ young people already experience. Minors who experience family rejection based on their sexual orientation or gender identity face especially serious health risks. Research shows that lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were more than eight times more likely to report having attempted suicide, more than five times more likely to report high levels of depression, more than three times more likely to use illegal drugs, and more than three times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection.

The Trevor Project released its 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. The Minnesota data found that 43% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide and 13% attempted it. Also, 70% of LGBTQ youth reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety and 56% reported symptoms of depression. The survey asked about conversion therapy and 11% had been threatened with conversion therapy and 4% subjected to it.

There are no studies demonstrating the efficacy of this treatment. It's time to put a stop to these therapies and support the mental health of young people who are exploring, defining, and articulating their identity.

Sincerely,

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