

Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, D.C.

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Testimony on Bill 20-501, Conversion Therapy for Minors Prohibition Amendment Act of 2013

Delivered before the Committee on Health

June 27, 2014

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Alexander. I am Saul Cruz, Secretary of the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, which was founded in 1971.

We support Bill 20-501, the Conversion Therapy for Minors Prohibition Amendment Act of 2013. The Texas Republican Party recently endorsed "reparative therapy," another term for conversion therapy. Today's hearing is therefore especially timely, as the far-right war against science continues to rage across our country. We thank Councilmember Mary Cheh for introducing this bill, as well as her eleven co-sponsors. We favor retitling it the "Youth Mental Health Protection Act" to more accurately reflect its purpose.

Bill 20-501 will protect LGBT youth from District-licensed therapists who make false claims that being gay or transgender is a mental illness. The American Medical Association and American Psychological Association have denounced so-called conversion efforts.

Anti-gay animus is often dressed up as science. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association revised its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders to declassify homosexuality as a disorder in 1973, and transgender identity in 2012. The real problem faced by sexual minority youth is intolerance.

Abbe Land of The Trevor Project writes that these "dangerous and discredited sexual orientation change efforts ... do not work to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, neither are they condoned by any major medical organization. In fact, studies show that LGBTQ youth who are subjected to or coerced into these harmful practices are more likely to face a range of negative outcomes including depression, substance abuse and suicidality."

This so-called therapy uses rejection, shame, and psychological abuse to pressure young people to try to change who they are. It is disingenuous for our opponents to claim that their young patients seek this treatment, considering the lack of understanding and affirmation the minors in question face.

Young people experience sexual orientation change efforts as a form of family rejection. By educating parents on the harmfulness of these practices, Bill 20-501 will help improve health outcomes among vulnerable youth.

No young person should be shamed by a mental health professional into thinking that who they are is wrong. Such professionals should provide ethical and affirming care for LGBT youth.

We must protect our youth from junk medicine. You will hear today from peddlers of it. Let us be clear: we do not seek to restrict freedom of speech or religion. We seek to regulate licensed therapy. Federal courts have upheld similar laws in California and New Jersey. GLAA has defended our opponents' rights, as when "ex-gay" advocates ran ads on subway platforms in 2003. But free speech and religious ministries are not the same as professional licensing. The science regarding conversion therapy is a settled question. Our opponents lost.

Health care should not be based on misinformation. This bill will send clear guidance that conversion therapy is harmful and not an acceptable practice among District-licensed providers.

We stand for the right of all our youth to make the most of who they are, and not be subjected to mistreatment disguised as health care.

Thank you.

Notes

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4. Abbe Land, The Trevor Project, "U.S. Ninth Circuit Court Rules to Protect LGBT Youth," August 29, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/pjuvj7>
5. Benedict Carey, "Psychiatry Giant Sorry for Backing Gay 'Cure,'" *The New York Times*, May 18, 2012, <http://tinyurl.com/d3po3w9>
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