

We endorse Bill 20-501, the "Conversion Therapy for Minors Prohibition Amendment Act of 2013." Thanks to Councilmember Mary Cheh for introducing it, and to its eleven co-sponsors. We favor retitling it the "Youth Mental Health Protection Act" to reflect its purpose more accurately.

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 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 wrote in August 2013 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."

Therapists who market conversion therapy services (including treatments by phone) to parents in the D.C. area include Richard Cohen and Christopher Doyle, both well-known proponents of these practices. So this problem is close to home. It is essential that the District protect its children by legislating against these dangerous and abusive practices, and add its voice of protest to those around the world.

10 Points on Conversion Therapy

1. Bill 20-501 will protect youth from so-called "conversion therapy," a dangerous and discredited practice aimed at changing their sexual orientation or gender identity.
2. Conversion therapy is based on the claim that being LGBT is a mental illness that needs to be cured, a view that has been rejected as scientifically invalid by every major mental health group for decades.
3. The nation's leading medical and mental health associations have warned that there is no evidence conversion therapy works, and that it may cause serious harm.
4. These harmful practices use rejection, shame, and psychological abuse to coerce young people to try to change who they are.
5. Conversion therapy can lead to depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, and even suicidal behavior.
6. No young person should ever be shamed by a mental health professional into thinking that who they are is wrong. Mental health professionals should provide ethical and affirming care for LGBT youth.
7. We cannot allow one more young person to be endangered by these discredited practices.
8. Bill 20-501 will send clear guidance to providers and the community that conversion therapy is harmful and not an acceptable practice among licensed providers within the District.
9. Young people experience sexual orientation change efforts as a form of family rejection. By educating parents about the harmfulness of these practices, Bill 20-501 will help improve health outcomes among vulnerable youth.
10. Contrary to claims by our opponents, we do not seek to infringe upon freedom of speech or religious practices. We seek to regulate licensed therapy. Similar laws in California and New Jersey have already been upheld by federal courts.

Notes

1. "Conversion Therapy for Minors Prohibition Amendment Act of 2013," Bill 20-501, <http://tinyurl.com/ktx48lx>
2. GLAA, "Prohibiting Conversion Therapy for Minors," *Building on Victory*, January 4, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/glaa2014htm>
3. Zack Ford, "APA Revises Manual: Being Transgender Is No Longer A Mental Disorder," *Think Progress*, December 3, 2012, <http://tinyurl.com/bo9d4am>
4. Abbe Land, The Trevor Project, "U.S. Ninth Circuit Court Rules to Protect LGBT Youth," August 29, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/pjuyv7>
5. Benedict Carey, "Psychiatry Giant Sorry for Backing Gay 'Cure,'" *The New York Times*, May 18, 2012, <http://tinyurl.com/d3po3w9>
6. Caitlin Ryan, et al., "Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults," *Pediatrics* 346 (2009), <http://tinyurl.com/nkkparl>
7. International Healing Foundation, Staff listing, <http://tinyurl.com/kt28uk5>
8. Jason St. Amand, "S. African Teen Dies After Alleged Torture at 'Gay Conversion' Camp," *Edge Boston*, April 30, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/ohoy8bv>
9. Justin Snow, "Federal court upholds California ban on 'ex-gay' therapy," *Metro Weekly*, August 29, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/nt3zmr>
10. Sunnive Brydum, "Federal Court Upholds New Jersey's Ban on 'Ex-Gay' Therapy," *Advocate.com*, November 9, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/nghlf7y>
11. World Health Organization, "'Therapies' to change sexual orientation lack medical justification and threaten health," May 17, 2012, <http://tinyurl.com/kjr7u56>
12. Catherine Tuerk, *Mom Knows: Reflections on Love, Gay Pride and Taking Action*, June 2012, <http://tinyurl.com/ps7hqjo>

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Protecting Youth from Conversion Therapy

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"Our kids are the way they are from the very beginning—not better, not worse, just a little different. When they fall in love, everything is exactly the same. All they want is a normal life. They want life partners. They want to nurture like the rest of us. They also might want to dance."

— Catherine Tuerk