

**House Committee on Health Care
Hearing for HB 2307 Youth Mental Health Protection Act
February, 23, 2015
Testimony submitted by: Buster Ross, Professional Counselor**

Chair Greenlick and Members of the House Committee on Health Care:

My name is Buster Ross and I am the LGBTQ Program Director of a nonprofit addiction treatment organization. I am writing to extend my strong support for banning of the use of conversion therapy on youth by mental health professionals in Oregon.

I am a Professional Counselor, Certified Sexuality Counselor, and Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor II. I am a clinician, researcher, trainer, and teach graduate level counseling students.

I'd like to begin by quoting Dr. David Kaplan, the Chief Professional Officer of the American Counseling Association—the largest association of counselors in the United States. In testifying before the D.C. Committee on Health on June 27th of 2014, David said, **“Efforts to change sexual orientation from homosexuality to heterosexuality do not work, have the potential to do great harm to a child, and are aimed at treating a mental health problem that does not exist.”**

My own research, together with many other studies, has clearly demonstrated the harm caused by these sorts of change efforts. **In the mental health profession, it is a well-established fact that sexual orientation change efforts increase suicide risk, mental illness, illicit drug use, and other health risk factors like HIV.**

In fact, the connection between change efforts and negative outcomes is now so well-established that **every major mental health professional organization in the country opposes conversion therapy**. In addition to my own national association, the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, this also includes the American Psychological and Psychiatric Associations, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Counseling Association and groups dedicated specifically to children's health, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American School Counselor Association and the National Association of School Psychologists.

Let me be clear—the mental health field has taken the position that being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is *not* a mental disorder and thus is *not* something that can or should be “cured.”

In my four years specializing in treating lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people dealing with substance abuse, I have worked with dozens of clients who have endured some form of conversion therapy in their lives. **I have seen firsthand the devastating effect that these kinds of change “therapies” have on people.**

It is on behalf of these Oregonians, and the next generation of our young people, that I implore you today. These practices are deeply harmful, and put both consumers and the mental health profession at great risk. We must not allow them to continue.

Thank you again for your consideration of this important bill, and I urge your ‘aye’ vote.

Buster Ross, MA, LPC, CSC, CADC II