

To: Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood
From: Arthur J Saffir, DMD, Ph.D.
Re: HB 2307 Youth Mental Health Protection Act
Date: April 28, 2015

Dear Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,

I am Arthur Saffir, father of Jason Zenobia and I am here today to encourage you to pass HB 2307, the Youth Mental Health Protection Act.

In 1987, when Jason was at Lake Oswego High School he completely surprised me when he told me that he was gay. I wanted the best for Jason. I was concerned with how would his being gay affect him.

Up to that point, most of my awareness of being gay came from off-color jokes. What little I knew, or thought I knew, made me very concerned. I was concerned that Jason would be rejected by society, unable to find happiness and unable to find the love that I shared with my wife. Clearly, I was woefully ignorant, and I had to do something about that first.

My professional life is biomedical research and development. My career was built around years of experience solving technical problems. I did what I knew how to do best--reviewed the medical and scientific literature to learn about Jason's "condition" and what I could do to help him. But I made one terrible mistake, and I have come here today to help you to protect others from making the same mistake.

The literature supported the idea that sexual orientation was changeable by clinical intervention. But, the journal articles were wrong and I was misled.

We arranged for Jason to see a psychologist at Lutheran Family Services in Portland. The psychologist quickly concluded that Jason was gay and should learn to live a happy and fulfilling life as a gay man. He was right, but I was still so steeped in misinformation that I didn't accept this conclusion.

Next I contacted the psychologist receiving the most funding from the state of Oregon for treating people convicted of sexually deviant crimes. He referred me to a well-respected colleague who had a lot of experience with clinical intervention for young gay people. After a number of treatments Jason convinced him that he was cured. The matter was dropped.

When Jason was a college freshman at University of Puget Sound he told us that he was in fact gay. By this time I had learned that being gay did not mean Jason would not be rejected by many people; he could find happiness and he could find the kind of love that his parents shared.

We never went back to that psychologist, who no doubt was convinced his practice was valid and continued to bring grief to more families. My mistaken belief in his false practice caused grief and harm to Jason and our family.

Twenty-five years later Jason has found great happiness; he has attained profound love with our very wonderful son-in-law, Brent. I come to ask you to help others to avoid my terrible mistake.

Please, protect every family in Oregon. Please ban the practices of conversation therapy in Oregon, by voting in support of HB 2307, so we can protect future generations from this cruel practice.

Thank you,

Arthur J Saffir, DMD, Ph.D.
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