

To: Senate Committee on Human Services & Early Childhood
From: The Reverend Cecil Prescod, Ainsworth United Church of Christ
Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2307
Date: April 28, 2015

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee:

I urge your support for HB 2307, the Youth Mental Health Protection Act, which will ensure that licensed professional health care providers do not subject Oregon youth to harmful conversion therapy.

To those who worry that this bill is an infringement on religious freedom and our first amendment rights I say absolutely not. This bill does not restrict any protected First Amendment speech. It prohibits discredited treatments by state-licensed mental health care professionals. It does not apply to clergy or to individuals who provide religious instruction. It also does not prevent anyone from publishing, discussing, or advocating any viewpoints or beliefs regarding sexual orientation or anything else.

The bill regulates only professional therapy, which is a form of medical treatment that is highly regulated to protect the public's health and safety. We expect the state to regulate potentially dangerous medical treatments, and this is no exception.

As a member of the clergy and *Minister of Faith Formation at Ainsworth United Church of Christ*, I lift up with joy the opportunity for Oregon to say 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 care that is ethical and affirming for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people. We can't allow one more young person to be targeted and hurt by these dangerous and discredited practices.

Young people who undergo conversion therapy report increased long-term depression, and many have taken their own lives as a result. LGBT youth are already at heightened risk for suicide; conversion therapy presents additional, unnecessary and preventable, risk factors.

As a person of faith I believe we must surround our young people with support, affirmation, positivity and encouragement. I believe in building communities of love that foster an environment in which young people can flourish and contribute to their school, their place of worship and to the community broadly. We have an opportunity to do this for our state by passing a policy that says no to therapy aimed at changing or suppressing who you are.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge your support for the Youth Mental Health Protection Act, HB 2307.

Sincerely,
Rev. Cecil Prescod
Ainsworth United Church of Christ