

To: Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood
From: John Paulk, 1030 SW Jefferson Street, Apt. 420, Portland, OR 97201
Re: Hearing for HB 2307 Youth Mental Health Protection Act
Date: April 28, 2015

My name is John Paulk and I strongly support House Bill 2307, the Youth Mental Health Protection Act.

For nearly two decades I served as the spokesperson for Exodus International and Portland Fellowship, two ex-gay organizations based in Oregon. These years were the hardest years of my life. I was in denial about being gay. It wasn't in fact true, any of it. Worse than being wrong, it was harmful to many people—and caused me years of pain in my own life.

Exodus and Portland Fellowship operated under the false claim that being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is a mental illness that should be cured. They used licensed therapists to work with families to try to “cure people of their homosexuality.” This of course is not possible and unnecessary. I deeply regret the harm I caused to so many people with my work with these groups.

When I came out three years ago I heard from many people across the country, mostly gay men and their parents, who were deeply hurt by my work and deeply regretted participating in these programs. These parents trusted us, because we referred them to licensed professional therapists who said they should and could change someone's sexual orientation. The truth was we could not and did not need to. They were all perfect just the way they were born.

What's really hard for me is to know that, since I left Portland Fellowship 13 years ago, this harmful and discredited practice still continues in Oregon. I took me 25 years accept who I was inside and truly love myself. No one should have to experience this ever again—especially confused, developing teens and youth.

I strongly urge this committee to vote in support of HB 2307, so we protect future generations of Oregonian children and families from this sort of deep harm.

Thank you.

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