

To: Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood
From: Robert Abbott, 15014 SE Woodland Way, Oak Grove, OR 97267
Re: HB 2307 Youth Mental Health Protection Act
Date: April 28, 2015

My name is Robert Abbott and I strongly support House Bill 2307, the Youth Mental Health Protection Act, based on my own personal experience.

From the age of 3, I was aware that I was attracted to other boys in a way that I was not attracted to girls. However, having grown up in the Southern Baptist Church organization and shifting into the Four Square Church organization in college, I was deeply closeted as a gay male. I developed a "split" in my consciousness just to survive.

At 30 years old I was married with three children. I was desperately lonely and unhappy in spite of the fact that I loved my family. I was dying inside. For the first time in my life I told someone that I was gay, and was sent to my church councilor who told me, "*There are NO homosexuals in heaven.*" I then told my wife who found Portland Fellowship, a local chapter of the national organization called "Exodus," and insisted that I go.

In "Reparative Therapy" at Portland Fellowship, I was surrounded by 40 to 60 people at the weekly evening meetings. All of us were emotionally fragile people, desperately hoping to find some peace with their "incorrectness." The message of the fellowship was "you are broken and need to be fixed."

After two years at the fellowship I realized that the reason I was not buying into the message was that I was not broken. It dawned on me that if I was able to "come out" and be who God made me to be, I would be OK. When I did, I was showered with rage of my parents, family and my wife. But I survived and rose from the ashes. Now, 25 years later, I just celebrated my 18th year anniversary with my beautiful David. My three children are awesome adults who share the values of respect and justice for all people.

Having attempted and endured change therapy as an adult, I can only imagine the deeply negative effects it would have on a vulnerable teenager. The high-risk destabilization of mental processes involved really does push a person to consider terribly destructive behavior—even suicide.

This is very serious business. I urge this committee to vote in support of HB 2307, so others—especially vulnerable youth—are not forced to endure what I went through.

Thank you,

Robert Abbott
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