

**To: Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood**  
**From: Vickie Read, 1750 SW 18th St, Pendleton, OR 97801-4456**  
**Re: HB 2307 Youth Mental Health Protection Act**  
**Date: April 28, 2015**

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee:

My name is Vickie Read and I am a parent, a retired high school counselor from Pendleton High School, and a founding member of Pendleton's chapter of PFLAG, Parents, Family and Friends of LGBTQ people. I have lived in Oregon my entire life: I was born in Bates, raised in Baker City, attended college at Oregon State University, and I raised my family here in Pendleton. **I strongly urge you to pass HB 2307.**

I met my husband, Lonnie, at Oregon State University. Together, we've got two fantastic kids, Kelli and Jeff. Growing up, they played sports, studied hard, and made lots of friends. We were a happy family, and life was good.

One day, when my son was in high school, I went into his room. I was being a snoopy mom, like so many moms are from time to time. Up on his computer screen was a chat room for gay teens. I got sick to my stomach. *Oh my god. Maybe my son is gay.* I was panic-stricken. This was 1997, just after Matthew Shepard's death. Like Shepard, we were living in a rural cowboy town. I thought that if anyone found out, he would die.

I asked my husband to ask our son if he was gay. When Lonnie asked if he was gay, Jeff burst into tears. "I think I might be. I'm so sorry. I don't know what to do. I know mom's not going to be happy about this." My husband supported our son fully, but I didn't. When my husband told me, like so many parents, I didn't know what to do. I'm not proud of how I acted at that time, but I didn't know any better.

I was confused and scared, and I reached out to the one resource I had: a nearby counselor I'd worked with once before. I sent my husband and son to see her. *I don't need counseling,* I thought. *They're the ones who need help.* I hoped the counselor practiced conversion therapy and could change who he was. Luckily, she was supportive of him and my husband, and knew that I was the one with work to do. I needed to accept my child.

When Lonnie and Jeff came home from the counselor's office, I told Jeff he couldn't be gay. I wasn't okay with it. He said, "mom, why would I choose to be something people hate?" Hearing him say that hit me hard. He was right. Jeff was the kind of kid who always wanted to do the right thing. He had never chosen to be anything other than the best kid a mom could hope for. He'd chosen to practice hard and become first in tennis. He'd chosen to study hard and be first in his class. But he hadn't chosen to be gay. It was who he was.

It took me about two years to educate myself. Jeff had suggested I look at PFLAG's web site. I read other parents' stories. I watched *Will & Grace* every week. At the time, I was in a graduate program for counseling. One of my classmates reached out to me to tell me about her gay daughter, how much she loved her daughter's partner, and how wonderful their life

was together. She even took me to my first PFLAG meeting. I met parents like me. Their kids sounded like mine. I heard about gay kids who were happy, healthy, and part of their families.

In 2005, I started up a Pendleton chapter of PFLAG to support local parents like me. And in 2013, I saw my son marry his wonderful husband. I had never seen him as happy as he was on his wedding day. And now I know what it's like to have this big, beautiful family in my life. I wouldn't have all this love in my life if I hadn't accepted him.

As a parent and a high school counselor, I can see nothing but damage from conversion therapy. I had conviction in changing my child. If my husband had also been unsupportive, we would have done so much damage to him. Having worked at Pendleton High School, I've seen kids struggle with their parents' acceptance. And when that lack of acceptance also comes from an authority figure, like a mental health provider, the results can be tragic. They're left with nowhere to go, and no one to reach out to. Our kids already struggle to be accepted every day, and subjecting them to conversion therapy on top of that is devastating.

**Please vote YES on HB 2307 and bring an end to this harmful, discredited practice.**