

Submitter: Kenneth Steinbacher

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

I am a Queer and Nonbinary Oregonian and a Professional Counselor Associate. I work with adults through many circumstances of identity development, particularly gender identity. One concern I have with conversion therapy is how restrictive it is. Counselors should not have a vested interest in any one outcome. In my work we explore all options and let clients come to their most authentic selves, be they transgender or cisgender. The opposition to this bill claims we are restricting their freedom of speech and/or religious freedom, but this is not about them. It is about the clients, and conversion therapy restricts their freedom by assuming only one acceptable (and biased) outcome.

It is my understanding that legal precedent affirms that medical providers cannot do harm to their patients even with their consent and that legal precedent also shows that mental health provision is to be held to that same standard. It is a slippery slope we tread when we weaken this standard. And it is this standard of consent that we must truly pay attention to. If a client is experiencing the pressure of bigotry and shame from their community, are they truly able to consent without coercion? It is clear they cannot.

We also find that the current ban on conversion therapy for minors is flawed. Those within the profession with transphobic bias advise and counsel parents to get around the law. We need a full ban to protect minors from this too.

Banning conversion therapy will not push cisgender people into transitioning, it will only allow people who are exploring their gender to do so wholly and honestly. It will also save lives.