

Submitter: Deirdre Rundle

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

Conversion “therapy” is not therapy. True therapy is a collaborative act of self-reflection, emotional processing, and healing, grounded in methods which are backed by evidence and research. Conversion “therapy” is a reflection of our national culture of fear, distrust, and misunderstanding around the realities of human diversity. It is based on prejudice, not science. This practice seeks to deny clients the right to explore and express a fundamental part of who they are, in order to force them into a more socially acceptable role. This is done for the benefit of members of society who are made uncomfortable by queer and trans people, not the benefit of clients, who research has shown will overwhelmingly be harmed by exposure to conversion “therapy”.

This bill does not prevent people from changing how they identify over the course of their lifetime. Some peoples’ experience of gender and sexuality is fluid and may change over time, and it is important they be able to discuss those experiences in therapy without judgment. What this bill does is prohibit a provider from imposing their own will and desire on their clients by actively trying to change how their clients see themselves. This type of behavior is already unethical; the American Counseling Association’s code of ethics identifies a counselor’s primary responsibility as being “to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients.” I cannot see how denying a client’s identity and attempting to change it is anything but disrespectful of their dignity and knowingly detrimental to their welfare. Regrettably, this has not prevented some providers from engaging in conversion “therapy,” which is why this bill is necessary.

There is a concerted effort underway in legislative bodies across the country to attempt to deny the rights - and even the existence - of queer and trans people. This is a moment when decisive action to protect these vulnerable populations is exceedingly important, and this bill passing will be a huge milestone in making Oregon a safer, more welcoming place for LGBTQIA+ individuals.