

Submitter: K Hixson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

I am writing in support of HB2458. I have worked as a mental health counselor for over 20 years serving a wide range of clients under the LGBTQIA+ spectrum in Oregon. As both a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and as a Licensed Professional Counselor, I support this legislation for several reasons.

The standard of care for people seeking professional mental health care for sexuality or gender related issues is affirming therapy where questions about sexuality and gender can be explored without negative bias, discrimination, or coercion. Professionals who practice from a place of questioning gender affirming therapy or who question sexual orientation from an ideological standpoint or from their sincerely held religious beliefs are in a position to cause significant psychological harm to clients who are seeking professional counseling to further understand their experiences. People have many options beyond professional mental health providers if they are seeking spiritual counseling for their struggles with gender and sexuality.

All mental health professions abide by a code of ethics in Oregon which includes not harming clients, not providing fraudulent interventions, and specifically, “honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014).” In 2018, the Oregon Board of Licensed Professional Counselors and Therapists adopted the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics as the code of professional conduct applicable to licensed professional counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, registered interns, and applicants. This mandates our primary responsibility “to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients,” “and avoid imposing—[our] own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and to respect the diversity of clients.” We are also required to take a stance of Nondiscrimination: “Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against prospective or current clients...based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital/ partnership status, language preference, socioeconomic status, immigration status, or any basis proscribed by law.”

Any non-affirming sexuality or gender change efforts are not in alignment with the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and are therefore a violation of the regulations and ethical mandates for professional counselors, therapists, and associates in Oregon. Extending the conversation therapy ban to adults is in complete alignment with all current professional, legal, and ethical guidelines for professional mental health providers in Oregon.

Thank you.