

Submitter: Paige Matthews

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

My name is Paige Matthews, and I'm a Licensed Professional Counselor in Portland, and a Doctoral Candidate in Education and Leadership at Pacific University in Forest Grove.

When I first trained as a mental health counselor, I was learning how to do crisis work and suicide prevention. I'll never forget it—one of the first things my trainers asked me was whether or not I believed my clients had the right to kill themselves. She said you have to know your core values around that if you're going to do suicide work.

Do you believe people have the right to kill themselves?

What do you think?

This question is tricky, obviously. But yes, at the end of the day, I believe that people have autonomy, which means that they have the right to kill themselves. This answer might sound surprising, some queer therapist testifying at a conversion therapy hearing saying that people have the right to kill themselves. I get that. But here's the thing. I do believe that people have autonomy, but as a mental health therapist, my only job is to help people live. This was my trainer's point that day, that even if you believe people have autonomy and have the right to make decisions about their life, your job as a mental health therapist is to do everything you can to help them live.

This is the role of therapists, to help people live.

Research shows over and over again that conversion therapy makes people want to kill themselves. It makes kids want to die. It makes adults want to die. And if conversion therapy makes people want to kill themselves, mental health providers have absolutely no place administering it, because our job is to help people live.

Listen, I get it. I get that these are consenting adults asking for a service. They have the autonomy to ask for that. But they should not be able to find that service in a healthcare provider's office.

Mental health providers are here for literally only one reason—to help keep people alive. Therefore mental health providers cannot, and absolutely should not, engage in a practice that makes people want to die.

And you shouldn't let them.

Please don't let therapists hurt people. That's not their job. Please pass HB2458 to make sure that therapists' only job remains to help people live.