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Written Testimony Oregon HB 2458

As a queer member of the therapeutic community, I wholeheartedly support HB 2458. Here's why...I don't want others to go through what I went through.

I grew up in a conservative Christian home as the daughter of a preacher. My first attractions to females occurred at 14 years old during the early 80s. Since homosexuality is considered a sin in my family and my church, I didn't tell anyone what was happening in me. There were no 'out' individuals in the small farming community where I lived so I felt utterly alone. What I continually heard from the pulpit was that homosexuality was an abomination and on the same level as pedophilia. I was riddled with an exhausting, unending shame, and lived with the fearful understanding that I was a hideous, evil, dirty, unacceptable, unlovable, disgusting creature doomed to hell. There was no way I could tell anyone, even my closest friends, this secret I carried.

Fast forward to 20 years old when I married a Christian man in my attempt to be normal and acceptable. I thought that if I did the right thing before god, he would heal me and I would no longer be attracted to women. Around 10 years into the married, I fell in love with one of my female friends. Clearly, just being obedient to god's law didn't cure me. When my attractions to women came out in the open, I was given a few ultimatums in order to stay in my marriage, one of which included going to Portland's ex-gay ministry, Portland Fellowship, for help with my attractions. I knew that if I didn't go, I would lose everything. My marriage, my family, my friends, and my church community. I wasn't ready to face all that loss, and my shame and embarrassment level was so high that I conceded and went into the two-year program offered by the ministry. During my time at Portland Fellowship, I was also referred to a licensed therapist who was on the ministry's referral list. The therapists on that list had to support the ideology of the ministry. While I realize this Bill would not impact the operations of ex-gay ministries due to the separation of church and state and freedom of speech, it would eliminate their referral lists. That's a needed change and would further de-legitimize these religious organizations.

I threw my whole self into healing from my attractions during that two-year program. I did all the assignments, went to all the events, befriended the staff, went to therapy. Everything! Hook, line, and sinker, I was ALL IN! I was going to be the best ex-gay I could be, and 99% of the people in my life supported my efforts. When I finished the program, the director asked if I'd like to come on staff. I said a resounding yes! I started out as office help, then over a few years moved up to eventually become the Women's Ministry Director. I actively promoted the ideology I was raised with, that homosexuality is a sin, and that our right behaviors (holy choices) are what make us acceptable to god, and worthy of heaven. Being loved fully as I am, as a queer person, was never going to be in the cards for me.

The longer I stayed at the ministry, the more I realized how ineffective the program was for the women I worked with. And, the more I saw their suffering, the more I came in touch with my

own pain that I had worked so diligently to hide. It became unbearable to continue working at the ministry. In 2007 I left.

Two years later, I turned 40. At that time I asked myself whether I could live the next 40 years as I lived the first 40... Could I live the next 40 years in the evangelical and ex-gay world(s)? While I did enjoy my church community for the most part, and the staff at the ministry, I fully understood that I would only be acceptable to them, and remain in close friendship with them, if I continued in my quest to be a straight follower of Jesus. I felt like I was being propped up by the evangelical community, and everything I grew up with as a conservative preacher's daughter. AND, that if I stepped too far out of line, I would lose everything.

So I spent a year counting the costs of following what I knew deep inside about myself, that I was queer. I asked questions about what I believed from a Christian perspective. I considered, and wrote down all that I would lose, to follow this long term knowing about myself. While I did question the theology of my childhood to see if aligned with who I am, I mainly just tried to listen to myself, for the very first time in my life. I realized that all my life I had been taking in and believing (because it was "right") a lot of theology and beliefs that I had never taken the time to really question. I just went with it because so did everyone around me. That was my world.

In 2009, I left my husband of 20 years because I could not tolerate the idea that my life was propelled forward by the beliefs of my childhood and the evangelical world, instead of who I really am. The cognitive dissonance in me was screaming. I could no longer believe that I was created a queer human who was supposed to act straight for the sake of the evangelical belief system. I knew I could no longer deny my reality since childhood. So I came out in 2009 and lost almost everyone in my world. It happened just as I feared.

My time as a participant and staff member and leader at the ex-gay ministry is THE greatest regret of my life!! I spent seven years in that community, and in that time I lost me, I led others astray, and worst of all, created feelings of shame in people who really just wanted to figure out how to live freely and happily for the rest of their lives. I can't redo that time, but I so wish I could! Now I speak out against Conversion Therapy, Sexual Orientation Change Efforts, and ex-gay ministries at every opportunity presented to me.

What I wish is that no other human would have to go through this whole damaging process and waste so many years of life trying to be something they are not. I wish someone had told me when I was a teenager that I was beautiful and acceptable as I am, and that I was inherently worthy just because I exist. That who I love is real love, not sin and dysfunction. I wish that there were no ex-gay ministries for people to go to. I wish the evangelical community would realize their ideology causes queer people to kill themselves. I wish therapists all provided spaces where clients' humanity is valued regardless of who they love, or what their gender is.

We all know there is no scientific basis for Conversion Therapy and that it is denounced by every major therapeutic organization. It is only upheld by religious organizations, the church,

and therapists who are promoting their personal, religious worldview. This has to stop. While I appreciate that Conversion Therapy is no longer available for minors in Oregon, it needs to be banned for adults as well.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my story, and the need for this bill. Please vote in favor of banning Conversion Therapy once and for all in Oregon. It's one more step toward providing another level of safety for the LGBTQ2S+ community.