

Honorable members of the Oregon legislature,

I am writing to express my support for HB 2458, a bill to ban adult conversion therapy. As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and a provider of culturally sensitive psychotherapy as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Oregon, I have witnessed first-hand the devastating effects that conversion therapy can have on individuals who are forced to undergo this harmful and discredited practice. My heart breaks too often while hearing patients recount experiences of conversion “therapy”, which were based on emotional manipulation and abuse using distorted religious ideology. The ones that survive these abusive practices are forever affected by traumatic memories of it.

One specific instance comes to mind: an adult transgender patient of mine who experienced conversion “therapy” years ago as a young adult from an Evangelical Christian family offers a real-life example of someone who has been deeply harmed by this dangerous practice. She barely survived, but she does not truly live. She is frozen with complex-PTSD. The shame she experienced from that “therapy,” based on religious indoctrination and anti-trans bias, was a direct result of a “therapist” claiming to have the power to know her and her needs better than she knows herself. In her case, conversion “therapy” took her ability to thrive from her. While she has made some progress through supportive therapy, her reality is that she is practically catatonic and only able to function in survivalist ways to keep herself employed and housed, otherwise unable to do much more than wake up to take medication to treat persistent complex-PTSD.

Conversion therapy is based on the false premise that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer is a mental illness that can be cured. This idea has been thoroughly discredited by virtually all major medical and psychiatric organizations, including the American Psychological Association and the World Health Organization. Despite this, conversion therapy continues to be practiced in some parts of Oregon, causing immense harm to vulnerable community members who seek authentic lives and a sense of belonging.

Studies have shown that conversion therapy is associated with a range of negative outcomes, including increased rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and even suicide. This is because conversion therapy often involves tactics such as shame, guilt, and emotional manipulation, including threats of “eternal damnation” and social rejection, which can cause lasting psychological harm to those who are subjected to it.

In addition to being harmful, conversion therapy is also ineffective. There is no credible evidence to suggest that it can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity in a lasting way. This means that individuals who undergo

conversion therapy are often left feeling frustrated, disillusioned, and even shattered after their attempts to change their identity fail.

For all of these reasons, I strongly believe that it is imperative for the state to take action to ban adult conversion therapy by passing HB 2458. This bill would send a clear message that the state will not tolerate this discredited practice that often involves religious indoctrination and persecution under the guise of help. HB 2458 would help to protect countless individuals from the harmful effects of conversion therapy, ensuring that all are treated with dignity and respect, and offered only evidence-based mental health services to help them heal and live authentic lives, regardless of their sexual or gender identity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kacee M.