

Honorable Representatives of the State of Oregon:

As an Oregon resident and parent to 4 children spanning in age from 6 to 21, I strongly oppose HB2458, for reasons I will detail below.

Nearly 2 years ago, my husband and I became aware that our then 12-year-old daughter had been identifying as a different person at school. However, this was kept secret from us. Naturally, this caused a great divide between how my daughter experienced life at school and how she experienced life at home, resulting in tremendous distress and confusion.

In large part because of the dichotomy she faced between living as a different person at home versus at school, and the anguish and torment this placed on her adolescent mind, my daughter attempted to commit suicide last spring. Fortunately, she was unsuccessful, but her attempt resulted in close to a month-long stay in a mental health facility. During this stay, my daughter and her therapist demanded that we, her parents, use her chosen name and pronouns. Additionally, we were threatened that she would not return home if we did not agree. When I was able to speak with my daughter alone, I pointed out the lifelong ramifications of these choices on herself and others. Having these brought to her attention, she quickly agreed that she did *not* want those unintended consequences, and the request to use a different name and pronouns was dropped. Moving forward, her father and I had made the conscious decision to allow her the freedom of expression in her haircut and her dress. We attempted to remove gender from our language altogether, and outside of imparting knowledge to her about the harms of physical alteration to her body via hormones, binders, and puberty blockers, we worked hard to stop all discussion of gender.

Her stay and subsequent therapy at the facility was focused entirely on the gender identity issue. She was not taught coping skills, nor was she taught ways to process her feelings. Despite the fact that she had attempted suicide just a few weeks earlier, as soon as my daughter and I had an agreement on how we would proceed with regards to name and pronouns, she was released from the facility. While we were elated to have our daughter back home, we were left to wonder what the purpose of the previous weeks had been, if not to begin to understand the real cause of her anguish.

I had begun a search for a therapist who would not focus solely on gender identity, but would allow for exploration of what could be done to build resiliency in my daughter. I was explicit that my objective was not for my daughter to be pushed toward *any* particular gender identity, but that that was not to be the focus. My understanding was that “conversion therapy” only included a desire to change one’s gender identity or sexuality. I did not realize that even **asking a therapist to explore other causes of distress** would also be considered “conversion therapy”.

It is imperative for people to develop resiliency. Life has peaks and valleys, and while we enjoy the peaks, we must be strong enough to weather the valleys. Many have become so fragile of mind that they cannot handle life when they are faced with adversity. It was this endurance, strength, and resiliency that I sought to develop in my daughter with the help of therapy. The alternative was allowing her to remain so fragile that a single misuse of a word to describe her could result in suicide.

I could not find a therapist who would agree to this. Even when I clearly stated that my goal was not to “convert” my daughter, rather to explore avenues of her distress, and build resilience,

many were concerned they'd be accused of practicing "conversion therapy". My aim was not to convince my child that she is not whoever she believed she was. I sought to create enough resilience in her that no matter what happens in her life, she can and will persevere.

Therapy is not meant to blindly accompany the patient into the mental health crisis he or she is experiencing, rather it is to be a beacon of truth and light to help them find their way out of it. Mandating that therapists follow their clients on the path into crisis will only cause the crisis to remain. We need therapists willing and allowed to ask questions, consequently helping their clients move out of the crisis. This is equally as important for adults; in fact, it may even be more important, as adults have jobs, often families, and are expected to be contributing members of society. We need adults to be productive human beings, rather than so fragile as to be completely derailed by one or two misspoken words. Prohibiting therapists from probing into real life will result in a much more incompetent population, and it is a disgraceful disservice to people in crisis. Therefore, I vehemently urge you to vote against this bill.