

I'm a mother of a trans identified adult child. My child never mentioned or acted like anything other than their biological sex in their childhood and adolescence. After becoming friends with a trans identifying student, experiencing socially traumatic events, suffering from depression, and having what we were told was ADD but turned out to be undiagnosed autism, my child began expressing several consecutive identities. First, they were bi-sexual, then gender fluid, then non-binary, then finally declaring a trans identity. When I look back, I realize they were spending too much time online, I didn't follow my gut and cut off access because they were becoming more and more fragile and depressed; everything seemed like a trigger. And at the time did not realize how influential the internet could be.

Later, after they declared trans identity, I was shocked, in disbelief, and worried about their future. I feared their restlessness was leading them to find a solution as a solution from the depression or an escape from being who they were. After one declaration, then another, I was hesitant to jump on board with the latest label, so I kept reassuring them that I loved them, but did not celebrate.

After they left my home, I expressed my love often, but was wary of affirming and participating in an identity that simply was never expressed or modeled in their earlier years. Our relationship was being strained. I was invited and accepted an invitation to join a few sessions with their "affirmation only" therapist, because I had such a strong desire to repair the gap I felt forming between us. I anticipated and thought the purpose of the session was for us to communicate with each other. I was wrong.

When I walked in the first session, my child said they didn't expect me to call them by their chosen pronouns. I was relieved because I was struggling so much with that. I thought, maybe we can get to the bottom of this and work on how we are going to relate to each other. The counselor, instead of taking my child's lead, recognizing my deep yearning to maintain a relationship, and trying to find middle ground, chose instead to double down on the trans identity. I tried to just avoid pronouns altogether. Every time I would slip and use the wrong pronouns there

would be a deliberate shaming and correction from the therapist. There were blatant mental, and even physical intimidation by the therapist. I felt pressured and belittled. My child sat silently for the most part.

Over the course of the session my child went from what seemed as being open, to following the counselor's lead; getting angrier and angrier every time she pointed out my mistakes and pressured me. I could see the appointment had nothing to do with mending the strain on our relationship but more about furthering the therapist agenda; to affirm my child was trans. I have heard from several counselors since, how unethical the things I experienced were. There should be no "agenda" in a counseling session, except to explore and discover.

That is the last time I saw my child! Their choice, definitely not mine. It has been many years now. I miss them with every fiber in my being. I cried buckets of tears the first couple of years, until I could cry no more. I have reached out relentlessly, until I have been blocked on every means of communication available. I often wondered if we could have kept a relationship if the therapist had been less determined to bullying me and more intent on exploring the relationship between my child and I.

"Affirming Only" therapy, not only locks a young person into their self-diagnosis, that may be just temporary confusion, it so often closes the door on loving parents who simply struggle to believe their once gender conforming child is suddenly "born in the wrong body."

I am a caring human being and, if the stories are true, I don't want my child or anyone else's child mistreated by something like old school "Conversion Therapy" stories I've heard. I honestly don't think those kinds of things go on any longer. But, as it stands, the law is very vague; grouping anything that is not affirming or celebratory with the unethical practices of the past. Many counselors are confused and afraid of breaking the law so have backed off from dealing with

gender confused children and young adults at all. As a result, it cheats many young people, as well as their parents, out of good exploratory counseling they deserve. My child's counselor was not restrained by the law, at the time, because my child was an adult, but chose to affirm instead of explore. This law will ensure all therapists take this route with potentially equally disastrous results.

Conversion Therapy desperately needs to be defined; as to what it does mean and what it does not mean. I think we would all agree unethical practices or forcing ideas on unwilling participants is wrong. Confidential conversations between a counselor and their adult patient should be protected. A very old saying states "Don't throw out the baby with the bath water." That is what this bill does. It throws out all counseling and accepts only the self-diagnosis of the patient. We don't do that with any other condition. Free up therapist to do their job without the fear of breaking a law by simply approaching their clients with curiosity and questioning.

I adamantly oppose HB2458. Please vote against this bill.