

Submitter: Gary Conachan III

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

Speaking as someone in the mental health field, it is a well-known truth that repression - whether of feelings, thoughts, or parts of your identity - only makes things worse. It creates an internal conflict that brings about shame and guilt, to say the least. As a gay man, I am a living testament to the fact that one's sexuality cannot be changed. I spent over two decades fighting myself, ravaged by shame, depression, and an incredibly low self-esteem. Fortunately, I never endured the horrors of conversion therapy, but harm was done just the same. As a counselor, it is a moral imperative to not only "do no harm" to our clients, but also to help bring about good in their lives. HB 2458 will help keep qualified, trained professionals - those who should know better - from causing immense harm to individuals. This bill needs to pass for the sake of those who have passed, for the sake of those living, and for the sake of those whose lives are to be determined by practices such as conversion therapy. There is an immensely high rate of suicidality and numerous other mental health disorders within the LGBTQIA+ community, much of which stems from religious and culturally-based homophobia and transphobia. It is beyond the time to bring those stats down and for us to do better by taking care of those most marginalized by this deeply harmful practice. For the people of faith reading this, specifically those of Judeo-Christian traditions, you and I both know that Scripture is a testament to God's heart for the poor and the marginalized. Jesus came to turn the world on its head, proclaiming that "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." He spoke truth to power and died a horrific death, by the state, for this cause. I encourage you to take the time to consider what it is you're afraid of in this practice being prohibited. And I encourage you to ask yourself where Jesus would be right now. Would he be oppressing the marginalized, guiding them into deeper layers of depression and self-loathing? Or would he be dwelling alongside and proclaiming justice for them? You and I both know the answer.