

Submitter: Pamela Garfield-Jaeger

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

I'm a licensed clinical social worker with over 20 years of experience providing mental health services to teens, families and adults and I oppose HB 2458. The purpose of providing therapy is to explore underlying issues and help patients make the best choices for themselves. A competent therapist treats each client differently according to their individual needs. My concern with this bill is it prevents therapists from exploration therapy when gender is involved.

Historically, conversion therapy was a reference to sexual orientation. Most people agree the way conversion therapy was done in the past with gay people isn't helpful and can be harmful. However, the definition of conversion therapy has been expanded to a transgender identity. The difference is when people take on a transgender identity, there are very different circumstances and consequences. A trans identity usually leads someone down a medical path that involves many physical risks such as cancer, blood clots, sterility, urinary tract issues, early onset menopause, loss of sexual function, chronic pain, and much more. In addition, it is a very big decision that is impossible to reverse, so it must be made thoughtfully and while ruling out other possible co-morbidities.

In addition, it cannot be denied that in 2023, there are so many influences on your youth to take on a transgender identity in schools, movies, TV, peer groups and on the internet. According to the (now shut-down) UK gender clinic, Tavistock, there was a 4,000% increase in trans youth from 2010-2022. However, the numbers have stayed steady for adults. Many would argue that this increase is simply because of societal acceptance. However, if being transgender was innate for everyone, then why isn't there such an increase in trans-identified adults? Unfortunately, while many of us are being swept away with the drive to be tolerant and accepting, we are overlooking people who need help exploring other issues such as sexual trauma or autism. If this bill passes, these vulnerable people will not get the proper treatment because their therapists will continue to fear being labeled a "conversion therapist" and their patients will suffer greatly.

Therapists need to be able to do their jobs, and HB 2458 (while it sounds nice) prevents them from doing so.