

From: Brian Parrott

To: House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

RE: HB 2458

I am a gay man and I write to oppose House Bill 2458. I have read the testimony of several therapists who, as members of the LGBT community, profess to speak on behalf of me as a gay man. They do not. I have been through conversion therapy, and I credit it with saving my life.

Obviously, writing to you as a gay man, I'm not going to argue it worked. I didn't change my orientation. My concern is with the broad definition of conversion therapy in ORS 675.850 and that the definition would have prevented me from receiving the counseling that stopped me from committing suicide.

In my early 20s, I began grappling with the fact I was gay. I initially sought counseling with affirming therapists. After only a few sessions, I refused to return because they were trying to force me to accept something I was not ready to accept. No matter what I said or how much I explained my self-loathing and misery, they kept pushing me admit I was gay. They couldn't help me until I would admit that I was gay. I wasn't ready. I was clinically depressed, started taking anti-depressants, and still was seriously considering suicide as an option to avoid coming out. My life consisted of two basic themes, the general hormones and desires of a 22-year-old, and the constant disgust and despair that came with them as I thought about other men.

Around this time, I found a therapist practicing reparative therapy, another name for conversion therapy. My therapist and I talked about what it would be like for me to live my life as a straight man. He helped me find ways to decrease my sexual attraction to men, or at least a way to redirect and resist the urges. He helped me identify traits or characteristics I considered "gay" and we discussed whether to change them or to change my concept of them as gay.

As I worked through these issues, I started to realize that my concept of being gay and coming out was flawed. The affirming therapists wanted me to accept their reality of what being gay meant, come out, and admit it to the world. They urged me to sever ties with family and friends who wouldn't accept me for being gay. Through my work with reparative therapy, I realized that being gay didn't have to be all that I was. I came to understand that there were many worthwhile things about me that were not tied to my sexuality. As I became more comfortable with who I was, I came out to my friends and family, and while it wasn't always easy, I maintained relationships with people that affirming therapists wanted to destroy. More importantly, I stopped taking anti-depressants and stopped seeing suicide as a viable option.

I am familiar with some of the literature around conversion therapy. I recognize some may say that what I went through was not really conversion therapy since it didn't change my orientation. I'm not here to argue that point. In fact, my therapist was dubious that I could completely change my orientation. However, nearly every aspect of the therapy I received that was helpful clearly fits the definition of conversion therapy in ORS 675.850 and would be illegal under the proposed changes. The therapy was key to learning to accept myself for who I am.

There may be many reasons that gay men or women are not ready to come out. There may be other methods for therapists to work with clients. Therapists who do not want to use conversion therapy or the themes I discussed, are not required to. Adults should have a wide range of options available to them and have the option to find therapy that will work for them. Please do not take away this life-saving option for therapy.