

I am a queer, gender expansive licensed professional counselor in Oregon. I am also a tenured associate professor of counselor education, teaching counselors-in-training to become competent clinicians. I have been a licensed clinician for 8 years specializing in research, training, and counseling with queer and gender expansive people. Unlike many of the testimonies I have read opposing this bill, I am both personally and professionally qualified to comment on the practice of conversion “therapy”.

This is actually quite simple and need not much in the way of debate. Mental health professionals are never in the business of “convincing” someone to change their core and central identities. We are always in the business of affirming the exploratory process of knowing oneself more fully. This work includes the multiple, complex intersections of identity including (but not limited to) gender identity/expression and affectional/sexual identity. In therapy, everyone is afforded the space to know themselves better through the safe container of psychotherapy.

When the Oregon Board of Licensed Professional Counselors and Therapists adopted the 2014 American Counseling Association’s Code of Ethics, the “issue” at hand became a moot point. Counselors shall not impose values onto their clients and shall not discriminate based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Those that oppose this bill to ban conversion therapy are most certainly seeking to impose their “values” of invisibilizing queer and trans people by convincing them of the mutability of their identities. This is an act of violence and cannot be codified into law.

Conversion “therapy” isn’t therapy and has been condemned by all mental health professions in the country. The Oregon legislature must solidify the fact that counselors and therapists should never utilize this deadly approach by making it simply illegal, regardless of a client’s age.