

Submitter: Sharon Hale

On behalf of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

As a therapist, I work with people who have experienced all types of pain and trauma. The type of hurt that is particularly impactful on people's lives is the type that damages the sense of self and identity. When a child experiences a threat to the self, leaving the child thinking, "I am bad. The hurt I feel is my own fault", this becomes part of that child's operating manual. Every way in which that child moves in the world is filtered through that lens. It takes an INCREDIBLE amount of work to heal and grow past these experiences since they go so deep.

How does this relate to conversion therapy? A child or an adolescent being brought to therapy on the premise that what they are saying and feeling about the deepest part of their identity is inappropriate and needs to be "healed", is exactly that threat to the self I am talking about. The very existence of conversion therapy is a threat to children, and people.

The APA has firmly established that someone's sexual minority is not a condition to be "treated" or "healed" - But legislature is VERY slow to catch up to this and **every day that we delay causes more harm and pain**. It is unacceptable that we are continuing to allow harmful practices to exist when we know better.

There are many other things to say here, but this is how I see this issue at its core. The APA might say it even better:

- Ever since the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its diagnostic manual in 1973, it has been widely known that someone's minority sexual orientation is not mental disorder to be "cured" or "treated." Rather, it encompasses an individual's sense of personal and social identity based on their attraction to men, women, or more than one gender (Institute of Medicine, 2011). In 2013 the American Psychiatric Association removed "gender identity disorder" from the diagnostic manual (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Gender identity "refers to a person's basic sense of being male, female, or of indeterminate sex," and every person has a gender identity (APA, 2009b).
- Efforts to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity may encourage people to hide these aspects of their identity, which can lead to mental health problems such as depression, sexual problems, low self-esteem, and suicide (Beckstead and Morrow, 2004; Blosnich, et al., 2020; Dehlin, et al., 2015; Green, et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2018).
- Experts at the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have concluded that sexual orientation or gender identity change

efforts are “coercive, can be harmful, and should not be part of behavioral health treatment” (SAMHSA, 2015).

- Many who offer change efforts are not licensed mental health practitioners, so it is unclear what, if any, training or education they may have received to represent themselves as qualified. As of January 2018, an estimated 698,000 LGBTQ+ adults have undergone these efforts, 350,000 as adolescents (Mallory, et al., 2019).

For these reasons and others, I firmly support HB2458.