

Submitter: Heather Merrill

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

As a licensed mental health professional who specializes in trauma treatment, I support HB2458. Conversion therapy has not only been proven to be ineffective in its stated goals of changing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, it is also in itself a form of abuse. Clients are in a vulnerable position when they come to therapy and using a therapeutic setting to tell a client that core parts of their identity are wrong or in need of change is psychologically abusive. This is why clients who have been subjected to conversion therapy experience an increase in mental health symptoms including substance abuse, anxiety, and depression and also have a higher rate of suicide. While conversion therapy has been proven to be ineffective in its stated goals, gender and sexuality affirming care has been proven to reduce anxiety, depression, and rates of suicide in clients.

These research findings parallel what I have seen in my practice of counseling LGBTQ+ clients for twelve years. Clients who have received conversion therapy have to process the trauma received in treatment before they can engage in any other therapeutic work. Many of these clients have come to therapy because they are suicidal, severely depressed, experience anxiety that isolates them from others, and many manage these overwhelming symptoms with substance abuse. I provide gender and sexuality affirming care for my clients and I have seen how therapeutically significant it is for clients to receive care that affirms all aspects of their identity. This bill has the opportunity to decrease the number of clients who receive abusive treatment at the hands of mental health professionals and increase the number of clients who receive affirming care.

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