

Submitter: Elisa Friedlander

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care,
I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice in Oregon with nearly three decades of experience in my field. I am writing to urge you to pass this bill protecting adults from conversion therapy.

Conversion therapy is not evidence-based healthcare; rather, it is an outrageously harmful practice used in religious-based counseling practices to impose a set of religious beliefs upon vulnerable clients who see a safe place to explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors so they may have a better quality of life and positive, healthy relationships. Many clients come to therapy to work through childhood trauma; this unethical practice of anti-conversion therapy only increases shame and trauma. As therapists, we are called to care for our clients in a way that puts aside our own agendas - our religious background, our sexual orientation, our beliefs - and supports our clients in becoming their authentic selves so that they can feel whole and healthy and healed. In fact, our Code of Ethics states this explicitly. Conversion therapy, especially under the guise of religious freedom by therapists who have a religious agenda against gender and sexual expression, is the opposite of that commitment as therapists. Our Ethical Code calls us to not treat those clients where we cannot remain objective.

The Anti-conversion bill is a call for therapists to remain true to the ethics of our profession and protect clients from harm. It does not stop vulnerable adults from exploring their orientation, or expression, or beliefs - whatever those may be, It simply protects vulnerable people from those in a powerful position with an agenda that only aligns with a specific religious directive. No therapist or counselor who is licensed by the state should be allowed to use their religious beliefs to encourage people to try to change who they are or who they love.

I urge you to pass this bill without delay. Thank you.