

Submitter: Emelie Nelson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

I am a licensed school counselor, and have worked in the K-5 public school setting for the past 9 years. I am writing this testimony to oppose HB2458 which seeks to limit “conversion therapy” of minors. The reason this bill matters to me is because as a school counselor one of my obligations is to directly support students who may be experiencing barriers to their learning due to a variety of factors, including the home or school environment, mental-health issues, learning disabilities, and so on. I have an obligation to treat each and every student with the respect and dignity they deserve, while guiding them through a process of exploring whatever it is that is impacting them, and then connecting them to school-based interventions and support, or outside services as appropriate. In order to ethically do this, it is necessary that I take into consideration their developmental stage, family relationships, diagnosed (or undiagnosed) health conditions, and school history, among other things. This exploration is how I as the adult, work with school teams and caregivers to carefully determine the best path of support to help the child get the care they need to move forward. This model of support applies to all students, including our LGBTQIA+ student population.

It is an ethical obligation for a counselor or therapist working with a client/student to consider co-occurring disorders in addition to the factors I mention above in an unbiased manner, free from the influence of personal belief systems. Over the past several years there has been an exponential increase, specifically in the amount of female students, who are expressing confusion or a desire to change their gender-identity. Every single student that I have been aware of who is struggling with gender-identity is also a child who presents with behaviors that signal there may be underlying issues that should also be explored. This is not conversion therapy, this is respectful, ethical care of a child.

Affirmation-only counseling is unethical and could lead to unintentional harm of a minor. Please vote no on this bill.