

To Whom It May Concern,

As faith leaders, we are proud to support legislation protecting youth under the age of 18 from the dangerous and discredited practices of so-called “conversion therapy” in states across the country.

As religious leaders committed to helping people seek out and grow in faith, this bill is of particular importance to us. LGBT people are members of our congregations; they are our ministers, rabbis, imams, and other faith leaders. Houses of worship should be sanctuaries for all, and we support the full inclusion of LGBT people in faith communities. We believe that spiritual guidance should be dedicated to helping people reconcile their faith both with their inherent selves and with their life choices, not an attempt to coerce people into living lives antithetical to who they are. As faith leaders, we celebrate sexual and gender diversity as a blessing that enriches us all and encourage people of faith to embrace this diversity and advocate for social justice.

Though these bills would not regulate strictly faith-based efforts to change sexual orientation or gender identity, many licensed mental health providers rely on religious doctrine to justify harming the young patients in their care. There is room for respectful disagreement about the meaning of specific passages in our sacred texts, but using them to exclude or attack people violates the very spirit of our traditions and is morally unconscionable. While we oppose religious “ex-gay” and “transformational” ministries that purport to be able to change youth through religious repentance, we are especially concerned about the unique position of power a therapist has in the counseling relationship to send the message to a child they are not loved by their Creator or their community. These “therapies” frequently misuse faith-based values that rather should be used to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor as ourselves, and affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person. These practices have no place in a house of worship, and they certainly have no place in a therapist’s office.

It goes to the heart of our mission as people of faith to create conditions where every person can flourish. Loving, just communities embrace everyone; they are strengthened when all people are able to live fully and express their gender and sexuality with holiness and integrity. We want youth to feel safe talking to their religious leaders and to their therapists and doctors. We want those who face rejection from their families to find acceptance in their faith communities. We want those who have been scarred by reparative therapy to find healing in the holy.

As religious leaders who affirm sexual and gender diversity as gifts people offer to their congregations and communities, this bill is particularly important to us. Our hearts ache for LGBT people who do not feel safe in their homes or their houses of worship, as well as for the families who struggle to accept their children for who they are. Our support for this bill is not in spite of, but *because of* our faith. This legislation will curb harmful practices known to produce lifelong damage to those who are subjected to them and help ensure the overall health and safety of the LGBT youth in our congregations and our community. Thank you for supporting this legislation.

Sincerely,

Unitarian Universalist Association

Faith In America

Presbyterian Welcome

Religious Institute

Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)

Rev. Dr. Constance M. Baugh

Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director, New Ways Ministry

Rev. Brian D. Ellison, Executive Director, Covenant Network of Presbyterians

Rev. Dr. Marvin M. Ellison, Founder, Religious Coalition Against Discrimination

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gady, President, Interfaith Alliance

Rev. Annie Gonzalez, Young Adult and Campus Ministry Associate, Unitarian Universalist Association

Rev. Debra W. Haffner, President and CEO, Religious Institute

Rev. Anita C. Hill, Acting Director, ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation

Min. Yeshua A. Holiday, National Liaison, TransSaints Ministry of the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries

Rev. Kierstin Homblette, Beloved Community Coordinator, Unitarian Universalist Congregations of Colorado

Rabbi Debra Kolodny, Executive Director, Nehirim

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Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, Senior Minister, Middle Collegiate Church

Rev. Benjamin McKelahan, Pastor, Church of the Parables

Alex Patchin McNeill, Executive Director, More Light Presbyterians

Rev. Cheri Metier, Pastor, Revelation Christian Church

Rev. Mary M. Moore, Miami Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

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Rev. John Russell Stanger, Minister for Advocacy and Education, Presbyterian Welcome

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