

To Whom It May Concern,

The undersigned organizations are pleased to support legislation protecting youth under the age of 18 from so-called “conversion therapy” in states across the country.

Conversion therapy, also sometimes called “reparative therapy,” “ex-gay therapy,” and “sexual orientation change efforts”, is a set of practices by mental health providers that seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. All the nation’s leading medical and mental health organizations have come out against these practices—which include the use of shame, verbal abuse, and even aversion techniques like electric shocks—saying they pose serious health risks, including depression, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, and social withdrawal, which can lead to suicide attempts. There is no credible evidence that any type of psychotherapy can change a person’s identity, and, in fact, efforts to do so pose critical health risks, including depression, shame, decreased self-esteem, social withdrawal, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and suicidality.

As advocates for LGBT people, we have a unique understanding of the harms of reparative therapy. Reparative therapy is one of the many ways that a belief that “homosexuality is a mental illness” manifests. It negates entire lives by writing them off as a disease that can be cured. Our members, clients, and staff who have had personal experiences with the practice describe it as torture. We know the personal pain of struggling with an identity that is treated as deviant, sinful, perverted, or wrong. Youth forced to undergo “therapy” that attempts to fix an identity that is purportedly broken does nothing but increase the already disproportionate risks LGBT youth face.

Research shows that LGB youth are 4 times more likely, and questioning youth are 3 times more likely, to attempt suicide as their straight peers.¹ Nearly half of young transgender people have seriously thought about taking their lives and one quarter report having made a suicide attempt.² Young people who experience family rejection based on their sexual orientation, such as being exposed to conversion efforts, face especially serious health risks. Research reveals that lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection.³

As organizations that strive to ensure the well-being of LGBT people, we hold these bills close to our hearts. We understand the danger of believing some part of your identity is bad. Conversion therapy compounds the dangers of social, family, and even self-rejection and undermines the very existence of LGBT people. This legislation will curb damaging practices known to produce lifelong harm for those who are subjected to them and will help to ensure the overall health and safety of all youth. We thank you for supporting this important legislation.

Sincerely,

¹ CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC), *Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9-12* (2011), <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6007a1.htm> (last visited Mar. 24, 2014).

² Arnold H. Grossman & Anthony R. D’Augelli, *Transgender Youth and Life-Threatening Behaviors*, 37(5) SUICIDE LIFE THREAT BEHAV. 527, 533 (2007), available at <http://transformingfamily.org/pdfs/Transgender%20Youth%20and%20Life%20Threatening%20Behaviors.pdf>.

³ Caitlyn Ryan et al., *Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults*, 123 PEDIATRICS 346 (2009), <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/1/346.full.html> (last visited Mar. 24, 2014).

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Family Equality Council
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Gay-Straight Alliance Network
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality
Human Rights Campaign
Interfaith Alliance
It Gets Better Project
Japanese American Citizens League
Log Cabin Republicans
Marriage Equality USA
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
Transgender Law Center
The Trevor Project
True Colors Fund
All Under One Roof LGBT Advocates of S.E. Idaho (Pocatello, ID)
Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth (BAGLY)
Brooklyn Community Pride Center (Brooklyn, NY)
Center for Artistic Revolution (Little Rock, Arkansas)
The Center (Wichita, Kansas)
Cimarron Alliance Equality Center (Oklahoma City, OK)
Colorado Springs Pride (Colorado Springs, CO)
Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA)
Equality Kansas
Gay and Lesbian Services Organization of Lexington, Kentucky (Lexington, KY)
Hudson Pride Connections Center (Jersey City, NY)
Lesbian Gay Bisexual Community Center of Greater Cleveland (Cleveland, OH)
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center (New York, NY)
LGBT Center of Raleigh (Raleigh, NC)
LGBTQ Community Center Fund (Portland, OR)
LIKEME Lighthouse (Kansas City, MO)
Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center (Memphis, TN)
Milwaukee LGBT Community Center (Milwaukee, WI)

Montrose Center (Houston, TX)

New Haven Gay and Lesbian Community Center (New Haven, CT)

North County LGBTQ Resource Center (Oceanside, CA)

Oasis Youth Center (Tacoma, WA)

one•n•ten (Phoenix, AZ)

Outlinc (Lincoln, Nebraska)

The OutCenter (Benton Harbor, MI)

OUTright Youth of Catawba Valley (Hickory, NC)

Pride Center of Vermont

Project TAG (Tyler, TX)

Rainbow Center (Tacoma, WA)

Resource Center (Dallas, TX)

Ruth Ellis Center (Highland Park, MI)

Dr. Delores A. Jacobs, CEO, The San Diego LGBT Community Center (San Diego, CA)

Staten Island LGBT Community Center (Staten Island, NY)

Time Out Youth Center (Charlotte, NC)

Triangle Community Center (Norwalk, CT)

Wichita Kansas Center (Wichita, KS)