

June 7, 2023

To the Members of the Michigan House Behavioral Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of House Bills 4616 and 4617 protecting minors from the discredited, unethical, and harmful practice of conversion therapy.

The National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) is a national nonprofit legal organization in the United States dedicated to protecting and advancing the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families. NCLR's youth project was founded in 1993 specifically to address the mistreatment of LGBT youth in the mental health system. As part of our Born Perfect campaign to end conversion therapy, we have seen firsthand the devastating impact on parents and families when they are misled by licensed professionals who give them false information that therapy can change a child's sexual orientation or gender identity. Tragically, the harms caused by these practices include a significantly heightened risk of suicide, depression, and other serious physical and emotional harms.

Modern science recognizes that being LGBT is not a disorder. In 2009, the American Psychological Association convened a task force to review all the scientific data on efforts to change a person's sexual orientation or gender expression. The task force concluded that there is no scientific evidence that such efforts are effective, and significant evidence that they are harmful—especially for children. In the years since the Task Force completed its review, studies conducted by Dr. Caitlin Ryan, Director of the Family Acceptance Project, have further documented the destructive impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth when the adults in their lives engage in rejecting behaviors, including subjecting them to conversion therapy. The harms associated with this rejection are dramatic. Young adults who were subjected to these practices had dramatically increased rates of depression, illegal drug use, risky sexual behavior, and suicidal ideation and attempted suicide.

Because these practices have no scientific basis, provide no benefits, and carry such high risks, leading medical and mental health associations have issued policy statements strongly condemning conversion therapy and warning against its use on minors. The American Academy of Pediatrics has advised parents to “[a]void any treatments that claim to be able to change a person's sexual orientation, or treatment ideas that see homosexuality as a sickness.”

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The American Psychological Association advises “parents, guardians, young people, and their families to avoid sexual orientation change efforts that portray homosexuality as a mental illness or developmental disorder.” In 2015, a New Jersey court concluded that “any expert opinion based on the initial premise that homosexuality is a mental disorder or abnormal is unreliable and ... barred” and went on to rule that professional claims that being LGBT is a curable mental disorder constitute consumer fraud. A California court issued a similar decision in 2018.

NCLR has helped pass laws protecting youth from conversion therapy in 21 states and the District of Columbia and has helped defend them before four circuit courts. We strongly believe that legislative action is needed to protect youth from these dangerous and discredited practices.

Working closely with survivors of these ineffective and harmful practices, we know all too well that taking action to end conversion therapy is truly a matter of life and death. We are pleased to support this important measure.

Sincerely,



Shannon P. Minter  
Legal Director  
National Center for Lesbian Rights