

Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Chairperson Volk and Members of the Joint Standing Committee:

As national and local organizations representing tens of thousands of licensed mental health care professionals, we are writing to urge you to vote in favor of LD 912, a vital bill that would protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth in Maine from the dangerous and discredited practice of so-called “conversion therapy.”

Conversion therapy, sometimes referred to as “sexual orientation change efforts” or “reparative therapy,” refers to practices that seek to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices are based on the false notion that LGBT youth need to be “converted” or “repaired.” Contemporary science recognizes that being LGBT is not a disease, disorder, or illness, and is part of the natural spectrum of human identity. Conversion therapy is especially dangerous to young people, who have no protections against being coercively subjected to these ineffective and harmful practices. Well-meaning parents can be deceived by misrepresentations of conversion therapy providers, leading them to expose their children to this harmful practice.

Young people who undergo conversion therapy report increased long-term depression, and many have taken their own lives as a result. Often, providers of conversion therapy lead youth to believe that their families or themselves are the cause of their sexual orientation or gender identity, an assertion that goes against medical and scientific understanding, undermines family cohesion, contributes to social isolation, and places these youth at an increased risk of homelessness. Additionally, because conversion therapy does not work, a young person’s failure to change often leads to decreased self-esteem and self-worth. Sadly, LGBT youth are already at heightened risk for suicide, and conversion efforts present additional, preventable risk factors.

Most therapists understand that trying to change a young person’s sexual orientation or gender identity is harmful, wrong, and abusive. But unfortunately, in every state, some therapists continue to engage in these dangerous practices, deceiving parents, and causing LGBT youth to suffer lasting trauma. A recent Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law report revealed that an estimated 20,000 LGBT minors in states without protections will be subjected to conversion therapy by a licensed healthcare professional if state officials fail to act. These protections cannot wait.

It is important to note that this legislation is carefully drafted to clearly and narrowly define these dangerous and discredited practices. LD 912 does not prevent mental health practitioners from providing affirming counseling in line with the mental health and scientific community’s understanding that sexual orientation and gender identity cannot be changed at will, and should not be the subject of conversion efforts by licensed professionals. This bill would not impede our

ability to facilitate our patients' coping, social support, and identity exploration. Rather, this legislation enacts professional standards for state-licensed mental health providers to clarify that conversion therapy is ineffective, detrimental, and irresponsible when applied to minors. No credible study says otherwise; in fact, all credible research affirms the devastating harms of conversion therapy.

As mental health providers, our main responsibility is to put the wellbeing of our patients first. We have an obligation to protect all young people from harm. This bill would do just that.

We strongly urge you to swiftly pass this life-saving legislation.

[Signatories]