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Vermont testimony on SOCE therapy ban bill, April 2016

My name is David Pickup, and as a licensed psychotherapist, I am glad to tell you the other side of the story in terms of the science and anecdotal evidence concerning sexual orientation change efforts and therapy bans.

I feel compelled to inform you that if this bill passes, you will become unintentionally complicit in the furtherance of the effects of sexual abuse onto children. Every well-trained therapist knows that homosexual feelings often arise in heterosexual boys because of being sexually abused by older boys, men or pedophiles. One only needs to recall the infamous cases of Jerry Sandusky and vast sexual abuse via priests as shown in this year's Academy Award winning film, "Spotlight." To tell boys, their parents and their therapists that they cannot reduce or eliminate these unwanted sexual feelings because it is illegal to do so will certainly result in a rise of anxiety, depression and suicidality in these boys. I have personally seen this in men who feel there is no hope for sound, professional therapy.

I am a licensed psychotherapist in two states. I have two therapy practices, both of which are composed almost entirely of adolescents and men who are undergoing authentic Reparative Therapy for unwanted homosexual feelings. When I say authentic, I mean the real thing, not the junk and horrors that previous testimonies claim. My clients know that, for them, their homosexual feelings have arisen because of early gender identity inferiority, severely unmet unmet needs for affirmation, approval and affection, and/or sexual abuse. These issues get sexualized in puberty and cause them to feel homosexual attractions. As such, being Gay does not represent who they truly are or meant to be. For my clients, change occurs when we resolve these underlying causes so that homosexual feelings automatically lessen and/or dissipate over time. This is emotional change, not just behavioral change.

No competent therapist believes homosexuality is a mental disease, or that Gay people are sick. No competent therapist, many of whom are in Colorado, shames anyone to stop their homosexual feelings. No therapist

Previous testimony has informed you that Reparative Therapy is shaming and harmful. However, authentic Reparative Therapy's first foundational goal is to end any and all shame for having homosexual feelings. This must happen so change can occur. RT does not shame people or harm them. My colleagues and I never force anyone to do any therapy that does not fit for them, especially for children.

Previous testimony has claimed that therapists who facilitate sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) do so with the belief that homosexuality is a sickness or mental disease. This is offensive to the many licensed SOCE therapists who do not believe this. If change is happening to a client, it is happening because they want it to happen with time-honored therapeutic techniques accepted by licensed

therapists. They are not told they should change, or must do so. To do this would be a violation of our ethical codes.

The “scientific” evidence claiming proof of harm of SOCE is false. The most respected psychological association in the world, the American Psychological Association, concluded there is no proof of harm of SOCE in their 2009 Task Force Report on SOCE on page 82-83. Earlier in the same document, the APA states that evidently, some people benefit by SOCE. This is the most up to date research completed on the subject.

Also, there has not been one ethical complaint brought before any licensing board in any state against SOCE therapists in approximately the past 35 years. Where is all the harm coming from then? It would seem there is another agenda here in place.

This bill that would ban therapy for minors makes the a priori assumption that homosexuality is naturally inborn for everyone. My clients do not believe that homosexuality is inborn. They can sense this internally. The APA itself is on public record claiming that homosexual feelings are probably caused by a combination of genetics and emotional environment. Then, in their publications online, they state no one really knows for certain exactly what causes homosexual feelings. Given these unknowns, why are we trying to pass a law that is founded on the belief that homosexuality is always naturally inborn? This discounts the feelings and rights of the people for whom homosexuality does not fit and for whom Reparative Therapy really works, including minors.

Most of the previous testimonies of persons who have claimed harm done to them via SOCE have discussed what they experienced within religious counseling or programs. Why are we making laws against licensed therapists who are not doing harm to clients? Licensed therapists do not engage in religious or therapeutic quackery.

This bill banning therapy for minors is an egregious violation of rights. First, it's a violation of free speech, which the 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit Federal Appellate Court concluded last year when it ruled on the constitutionality of New Jersey's ban on therapy. This same court still upheld the ban, so now this inconsistent ruling is headed for the US Supreme Court. Second and beyond, it is a violation of a client's right to self-determination, and parent's right to have influence on the decision of health for their child, and this bill puts the government in the therapist's office claiming it knows what best for the child instead of the child and his/her parents.

Finally, this bill is a violation of therapeutic standards. This law specifically states it is illegal to conduct any therapy, which seeks to reduce or eliminate homosexual feelings. This prevents the children who are sexually abused by same-sex pedophiles, whose homosexual feelings have arisen because of this abuse, from getting the help they need to remove their homosexual feelings. Unfortunately, these events are not uncommon. Can you imagine a heterosexual adolescent coming into

my office who needs help for this kind of sexual abuse? Can you imagine me having to tell this grieving boy that although I can help him, I'm not allowed to because it's illegal? Colorado cannot pass a law that attempts to help one group of kids while harming another. At the very least, this bill should be immediately modified, or else this committee becomes complicit in furthering the effects of harm onto children.

I wonder if anyone here knows what it feels like to be sexually abused by a pedophile. I do...and this experience, plus emotional wounds resulted in my own homosexual feelings that arose in puberty. However, later I had the experience of transformative Reparative Therapy. And it fully worked for me.

There's another example of how this bill will harm minors. Some time ago, I had a potential client who attended a men's group. He stated that by chance he had just heard about Reparative Therapy through one of my publications. He stated at the time, in tears, that if he hadn't have found me two weeks before, he was going to commit suicide. There are other clients of RT I know that have expressed the same kind of suicidality for not getting the help they need with SOCE. This bill will certainly result in suicidality for those minors who are heterosexual but can't get the help they need with unwanted homosexual feelings.

Clients can't simply talk about their unwanted same-sex attractions with their therapists without being allowed to involve change therapy. SOCE is talk therapy, and must by definition be allowed to proceed. Actual change happens via talk therapy, which includes sound psychodynamic and Cognitive-behavioral methods. Also, a client who wants SOCE can't simply discuss his/her suicidality without SOCE because they would be dealing with what they state is the cause of their suicidal feelings.

This bill would also violate religious rights because it bans SOCE for all licensed therapists, which includes those therapists employed by the churches of this state who would then not be able to practice aspects of their faith with church members.

I urge you not to let this egregious bill pass. I am very sensitive to the proponent's testimonies, and I have great sympathy for whatever harm they may have experienced. However, any harm they experienced did not come from licensed and trained therapists. We simply can't allow this bill to pass.