



VERMONT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1017

Tel: (802) 229-5447

100 State Street - Suite 329

Fax: (802) 225-8948

Montpelier, VT 05601-1017

Email: vpaed@vermontpsych.org

**Testimony to Senate Health and Welfare Committee on S. 132
An act relating to the prohibition of conversion therapy on minors
February 5, 2016**

**Rick Barnett, Psy.D., LADC
Legislative Chair, Vermont Psychological Association**

To the honorable Senate Health and Welfare Committee:

The Vermont Psychological Association (VPA) is in alignment with the American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation which stated:

*“The task force conducted a systematic review of the peer-reviewed journal literature on sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) and concluded that efforts to change sexual orientation are **unlikely to be successful** and involve some risk of harm, contrary to the claims of SOCE practitioners and advocates.*

Even though the research and clinical literature demonstrate that same-sex sexual and romantic attractions, feelings and behaviors are normal and positive variations of human sexuality, regardless of sexual orientation identity, the task force concluded that the population that undergoes SOCE tends to have strongly conservative religious views that lead them to seek to change their sexual orientation.

Thus, the appropriate application of affirmative therapeutic interventions for those who seek SOCE involves therapist acceptance, support and understanding of clients and the facilitation of clients’ active coping, social support and identity exploration and development, without imposing a specific sexual orientation identity outcome.”(2009)

SAMHSA or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a federal agency, issued a report in October 2015 - Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth. This report states that

“Conversion therapy perpetuates outdated views of gender roles and identities as well as the negative stereotype that being a sexual or gender minority or identifying as LGBTQ is an abnormal aspect of human development. Most importantly, it may put young people at risk of serious harm.” <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA15-4928/SMA15-4928.pdf>

Since California became the first state to ban Conversion Therapy with Minors (2012) and this ruling was upheld in Federal Appeals court (2013), at least 3 other jurisdictions have enacted similar legislation – IL, DC, and NJ. Georgia has also recently introduced similar legislation.

One consideration regarding such legislation is the involvement of the law in mental health treatment. Does this bill set a precedent for the legislature to regulate mental health treatment? For example, legislation that seeks to impose limits on the number or type of medications prescribed by prescribing providers may be rejected by prescribers but also legislators. The Statutes on Unprofessional Conduct already protect the public through the professional regulatory boards.

Suggested amendments to the bill are as follows:

CHAPTER 196. CONVERSION THERAPY

§ 8351. DEFINITIONS As used in this chapter:

“Conversion therapy” means any practice by a mental health care provider that seeks to change an individual’s sexual orientation, including efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same sex, **against the will of the person seeking help.**

Thank you for your important work in this area.