

Support for Ban on Conversion Therapy

In May 2012, the Pan American Health Organization stated in a position paper, “Services that purport to cure people with non-heterosexual sexual orientation lack medical justification and represent a serious threat to the health and well-being of affected people.” The document notes that no rigorous scientific studies demonstrate any efficacy of efforts to change sexual orientation. However, there are many testimonies about the severe harm to mental and physical health that such "services" can cause. Repression of sexual orientation has been associated with feelings of guilt and shame, depression, anxiety, and even suicide.

The Human Rights Campaign reports that “so-called “conversion therapy” is a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Such practices have been rejected by every mainstream medical and mental health organization of decades, but due to continuing discrimination and societal bias against LGBT people, some practitioners continue to conduct conversion therapy. Minors are especially vulnerable, and conversion therapy can lead to depression, anxiety, drug use, homelessness, and suicide.”

Experts believe that up to one-third of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth experience efforts to change their identity, including by therapists. The belief that same-sex attraction and behavior is abnormal and in need of treatment is in opposition to the position taken by national mental health organizations. Conversion therapy is based on an understanding of homosexuality that has been rejected by all the major health and mental health professions. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Association of Social Workers, together representing more than 477,000 health and mental health professionals, have all taken the position that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus there is no need for a 'cure'.

This bill will provide clear guidance to providers and the community that conversion therapy is a harmful and unacceptable practice among licensed providers within Vermont. Young people experience conversion therapy as a form of family rejection. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are subject to family rejection are at heightened risk for depression, substance abuse, and suicide. By educating parents about the harmfulness of these practices, this bill will help improve health outcomes among vulnerable youth.

Organizations that oppose conversion therapy:

- American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
- American College of Physicians
- American Counseling Association
- American Medical Association
- American Psychiatric Association
- American Psychoanalytic Association
- American Psychological Association
- American School Counselor Association
- American School Health Association
- National Association of Social Workers