



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

The Honorable Assemblymember Randy Kirner
Chair, Assembly Commerce and Labor Committee
Nevada Legislature
401 S. Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701-4747

May 26, 2015

Re: Testimony re SB 353 from the Human Rights Campaign

Dear Chairperson Kirner and Members of the Assembly Commerce and Labor Committee:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), on behalf of our more than 15,000 members in Nevada, thanks you for hosting a hearing on the important issue of so-called “conversion therapy,” dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. While SB 353 begins to address conversion therapy targeted against young people, it is **essential** that this legislation also protect minors in Nevada against efforts to change their gender identity.

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. As an advocate for LGBT youth people, HRC believes that no young person should be coerced or subjected to dangerous practices that lack legitimate medical purpose, such as conversion therapy.

Conversion therapy, sometime referred to as “sexual orientation change efforts,” are practices, sometime performed by licensed mental health providers, which seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices are based on the false idea that being LGBT is a mental illness that needs to be cured, an idea which has been rejected by every major mental health group for decades. Conversion therapy does not include therapies that provide acceptance, support, or understanding of LGBT identities; that facilitate coping, social support, or identity exploration; or that address unlawful conduct or unsafe sexual practices. This legislation enacts professional standards for state-licensed mental health providers to clarify that sexual orientation change efforts are not an acceptable or responsible professional practice when applied to young people under age 18.

There is no credible evidence that conversion therapy can change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity, and it is abundantly clear that conversion therapy poses devastating health risks for LGBT young people. These dangerous practices can lead to depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness, and even suicidal

behavior, and for this reason the nation's leading mental health organizations have roundly decried them.¹ Unfortunately, due to discrimination against LGBT people and the fact that professional rules have not kept up with this widespread understanding, some licensed mental health professionals continue to engage in conversion therapy.

Research shows that young people experience conversion therapy as a form of family rejection, and LGBT youth who experience family rejection face increased health risks. In one study, such youth were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, and 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs compared with peers who had not experienced such rejection.² On the other hand, family acceptance has been shown to be an important protective factor that can help to prevent suicide behavior and mental health issues. Providers who engage in conversion therapy under the veneer of state license can mislead families about the risks involved, leading to negative psychological outcomes and irreparable damage to family cohesiveness. Legislation is needed to protect families from these damaging practices.

We urge you to amend SB 353 by replacing the term "sexual orientation conversion therapy" with the term "conversion therapy" and to ensure that this term includes efforts to change both a person's sexual orientation and their gender identity. Efforts to change a person's gender identity are ineffective and damaging in the same way as conversion therapy based on sexual orientation. Experts in transgender healthcare have condemned conversion therapy based on gender identity.³

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding SB 353. We urge you to make this important legislation full inclusive by adding gender identity to the protections against conversion therapy. If you should have any questions regarding HRC's testimony regarding SB 353, please contact me at 202-588-5935 or by email at Alison.Gill@hrc.org.

Sincerely,



Alison Gill, Esq.
Senior Legislative Counsel
Human Rights Campaign

Attachment: Compiled Policy and Position Statements on Conversion Therapy

¹ For example, the American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Counseling Association, American Psychiatric Association, and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy all have position statements criticizing conversion therapy.

² Caitlin Ryan, et al., *Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults*. PEDIATRICS 346 (2009).

³ Coleman, E., et al. "Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People, Version 7." *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 13:165-232, 2011. Available at http://www.wpath.org/uploaded_files/140/files/IJT%20SOC,%20V7.pdf