



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

The Honorable Senator Joshua Miller
Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

March 30, 2015

Re: SUPPORT for SB 480, Testimony from the Human Rights Campaign in support of the Prevention of Conversion Therapy for Children Act.

Dear Chairperson Miller and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), on behalf of our thousands of members in Rhode Island, thanks you for hosting a hearing on SB 480, a vital measure that will protect young people from dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change one's sexual orientation or gender identity. We urge you to pass this important legislation.

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 or expression. 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 or expression, 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. This legislation is needed to protect families from these damaging practices.

Finally, we urge you to make a minor amendment to SB 480, replacing the term "Sexual orientation and/or gender identity change efforts" with the term "Conversion therapy." Although many terms are used to describe the damaging practices this bill seeks to prohibit, the term "conversion therapy" is the most recognized and best understood by the general public. This change of language also brings this bill in line with the language of similar bills in other states. We believe this amendment will make the restricted practices very clear and prevent any confusion about the reach and limitations of the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of this critical bill to protect LGBT youth. If you should have any questions regarding HRC's support for SB 480, 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).