

March 8, 2018

The Honorable Robert G. Donovan, Chair
Public Safety and Health Committee
City of Milwaukee Common Council
200 E. Wells Street, Room 205
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Chair and Committee Members:

With the goal of promoting a healthy, safe, and affirming community for all, including LGBTQ people, we, the undersigned organizations, strongly support the proposed ordinance prohibiting the practice of conversion therapy in the City of Milwaukee.

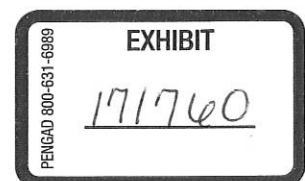
Conversion therapy, sometimes referred to as "reparative therapy" or "sexual orientation change efforts," refers to a range of practices by mental health providers that seek to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. Conversion therapy does not include counseling that provides support and understanding of patients or facilitates patients' identity exploration and development.

There is no credible evidence that conversion therapy can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. To the contrary, there is an abundance of evidence showing that conversion therapy poses critical health risks to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, including depression, shame, decreased self-esteem, social withdrawal, substance abuse, and even suicidality. This is why every major medical and mental health organization—including the American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, American Counseling Association, American Medical Association, and American Academy of Pediatrics— have condemned these practices. Unfortunately, due to discrimination against LGBTQ 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. A recent Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law report revealed that an estimated 20,000 LGBTQ minors in states without protections will be subjected to conversion therapy by a licensed healthcare professional if officials fail to act.

Research shows that young people experience conversion therapy as a form of family rejection, and LGBTQ youth who experience family rejection face increased health risks. In one study, such youth were found to be 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. On the other hand, family acceptance has been shown to be an important protective factor that can help to prevent suicidal behavior and mental health issues. Providers who engage in conversion therapy under state license mislead families about the risks involved, leading to negative psychological outcomes and irreparable damage to family cohesiveness. This ordinance is needed to protect families from these damaging practices.

We urge the Public Safety and Health Committee members to vote in favor of these crucial protections for LGBTQ youth in Milwaukee.

Sincerely,





Tony Snell
Executive Director



Gerry Coon
President & CEO



Ashley Altadonna
Comm. Organizer



Jeffrey Roman
Chairperson



Jason Rae
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