



West Virginia School Psychologists Association

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Dear West Virginia Legislators,

As Social Justice Chair of the West Virginia School Psychologists' Association, I would like to re-address our association's support, originally announced in November of 2018, for a state-wide ban on conversion therapy for West Virginia youth identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Such a ban would serve to protect youth mental health by prohibiting referral for conversion therapy practices, which are proven harmful and ineffective.

Conversion therapy, also known as reparative therapy, has been rejected by every mainstream medical, mental health, and educational organization. Several states and municipalities have enacted formal laws "protecting youth from this abusive practice". According to *The Lies and Dangers of Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity* from the Human Rights Campaign (2018), some practitioners who have used conversion therapy have since denounced the practice. Banning the implementation of conversion therapy with youth under the age of 18 is in the best interest of the children.

Conversion therapy is recognized as dangerous as it lowers self-esteem and increases risk of anxiety, depression, drug use, homelessness, and suicide for youth identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Empirical and anecdotal research does not support the use of conversion therapy. Furthermore, it reveals the damage caused by such practices. Health and mental health professionals have determined that homosexuality is not a mental health disorder; therefore, attempt to alter sexual identity under the guise of therapy is harmful and nonsensical. Research also indicates the harm suffered by individuals who are not accepted by their families or society due to their gender expression or sexual orientation. Allowing conversion therapy helps to maintain the harmful viewpoint that homosexuality is inherently wrong and is changeable when data has indicated otherwise.

In summary, conversion therapy is a harmful practice, which perpetuates a flawed societal viewpoint that innate sexual orientation can be altered. Mental health, medical health, and educational organizations have expressed clear agreement that conversion therapy on minors is a destructive practice without empirical support. West Virginia has the opportunity to stand together on the right side of history regarding the rights, safety, and most importantly, health of our youth.

For further information, please contact WVSPA's President, Christina Hare, at chare@k12.wv.us or myself at britainey.cooper@k12.wv.us.

Thank you for your consideration,

Britainey A. Cooper, MA, Ed.S, NCSP

*Lewis County Mental Health Specialist and School Psychologist
Social Justice Chair, West Virginia School Psychologists' Association*