

Elsen, Nikki

From: Deb Bassett <debb@7riverslgbtq.org>
Sent: Monday, July 11, 2022 6:13 PM
To: ZZ Council Members; Elsen, Nikki
Cc: Alesha Schandelmeier
Subject: Conversion Therapy
Attachments: Conversion Therapy.docx

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Good afternoon City Council Members!

We wanted to write to you all with just some additional information about Conversion Therapy that we thought you would want to know. A gentle reminder that 60 cities have now banned conversion therapy. If you have any questions or concerns, please be certain to contact us.

Sincerely,

Alesha Schandelmeier
Executive Director

Deb Bassett
Administrative Assistant

When one thinks of conversion therapy, it is easy to mistake it as a benign “cure” for homosexuality, also referred to as SOCE (Sexual Orientation Change Effort) or “reparative therapy”. However, it is anything but benign, and victims can be subjected to various forms of torture from physical to mental to spiritual. When we look at the various methods that have been used, it is clear that this can no longer be considered viable therapy, but abuse and torture for something that the APA no longer considers a psychiatric disorder.

The Williams Institute in California has determined that 81% of conversion therapy is performed by religious leaders, while the rest is typically performed by licensed therapists. Some of the modes of “treatment” are aversive therapy that consist of electric shock to the genitals while being shown erotic photos of the same sex, drugs to make the victim more susceptible to suggestion, nausea-inducing drugs while being shown erotic photos of the same sex, individuals being forced to hold their hands in ice until it melts while being shown erotic photos of the same sex, elastic bands on wrists that are snapped if individuals are aroused, etc. Other forms of “therapy” include degradation, covert sensitization, satiation therapy, or being locked in their rooms for months to pray and fast. Some counselors tell the individuals that they are deviant, broken, evil, etc., and that if they are not cured by the therapy then it is their own doing. Some religious leaders determine that they can pray the gay away, and they tell the individuals that they are too sinful if the prayers don’t work. They are told over and over that they are sick, disgusting, unlovable and an abomination destined for hell. Individuals are sometime shown pictures of things such as ruptured anuses and damaged penises and told that will happen to them if they continue their deviant ways. Drastic measure such as castration have been used in extreme cases.

It’s not hard to imagine that most victims of conversion therapy experience intense mental and emotional damage that often never go away. They will experience PTSD, depression, self-hatred, even suicidal tendencies, sometimes leading to suicide.

While one of the most common arguments against conversion therapy bans is based on the First Amendment’s Free Speech Clause, various courts have argued that it does not apply to speech that is harmful to others, fraudulent, ineffective or damaging. There have been court cases surrounding the banning of conversion therapy, and questions regarding the Free Speech Clause have been debated. In the 9th Circuit Court of California, it was determined that rather than actual speech, conversion therapy was conduct, with speech being only one of the tools used. The 3rd Circuit Court of New Jersey determined that the ban passed scrutiny because of the legislature’s “intent to protect minors”.

Conversion therapy, aversive or otherwise, has been proven to have no scientific credibility, and has been rejected by every major medical and mental health organization as ineffective and harmful, does not succeed in changing a person’s sexual orientation and often causes great psychological harm. And while parents have the Constitutional right to control the upbringing of their children, they DO NOT have the Constitutional right to subject children to harmful forms of treatment. Conversion therapy is a form of torture, whether physical or mental, and torture is NOT PROTECTED SPEECH.

Not only have the major medical/mental health organizations condemned SOCE, but hundreds of religious leaders are calling for a global ban. It is clear, then, that conversion therapy is both a harmful and failed practice, as well as having become a fraudulent practice. It has no place in a civilized, educated and informed society. It has no place in our city and the life of our children.