

**Colorado General Assembly
Senate State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee
Testimony *Against* House Bill 18-1245: Prohibit Conversion
Therapy Mental Health Provider
“Concerning a Prohibition Against a Mental Health Care Provider
Engaging in Conversion Therapy with a Patient Under Eighteen
Years of Age.”**

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Good afternoon Mister Chairman and Members of the Committee.

My name is Jeff Johnston. I testify on my own behalf and on behalf of thousands of men and women who have left homosexuality and walked out of gender confusion. I also represent my wife and three sons – young men who would not exist if I had not walked away from homosexuality.

I sought help for unwanted same-sex attractions for a variety of reasons, including my religious beliefs, my concern about the increased health risks associated with homosexual behavior, and because I wanted a wife and children. Counseling with a licensed mental health worker was an important part of my leaving homosexuality.

I am a Marriage, Gender and Homosexuality Public Policy Analyst at Focus on the Family, so I also represent tens of thousands of our Colorado constituents.

I oppose House Bill ¹⁸⁻¹²⁴⁵~~17-1156~~ for many reasons. My written testimony contains even more reasons than I will be able to state in these short, public remarks.

1. **More than 20 states have voted *against* this legislation.** The Colorado Legislature, thankfully, has voted down this legislation three years in a row.
2. **Organizations representing more than 100,000 licensed mental health professionals *oppose* this legislation.**¹ While other groups may oppose sexual orientation change efforts, for political or ideological reasons, no professional counseling organization has forbidden members to perform therapy that helps clients live in alignment with their faith. None.
3. **Licensed mental health workers do not use force, abuse, shame or coercion.** If they do, their client could file an ethics complaint, and their licensing board could discipline them.
4. **In four consecutive years of testimony, no ethics complaints or standards violations have been brought forward against any licensed mental health professional in Colorado who practices any form of so-called “conversion therapy.”** No ethics complaints. State licensing boards have educational and supervision requirements; testing and licensing procedures; and ethics and complaints procedures. Mental health workers also use informed consent and intake forms for each client. If there were examples of counselors in Colorado violating clients' rights, I'm sure they would have been brought forward by now.
5. **This bill threatens parental rights.** Parents have the right and responsibility to make decisions concerning the care of their children, because they have their child's best interest at heart. Under this bill, parents with a gender-confused five-year old could not work with a licensed mental health professional to help the child work toward congruence with bodily reality. In fact, lawyers supporting this bill said such help might be considered “child abuse.”

6. **This bill interferes with the religious beliefs and freedom of minors who seek counseling for unwanted homosexuality or gender dysphoria help that aligns with their faith.** Every mental health organization acknowledges the importance of a client's spiritual beliefs.
7. **Every mental health organization supports client autonomy and self-determination,** the client's right to determine the course of treatment. This legislation takes that right away from minors.
8. **For four years, proponents have said talk therapies have "been proven to be damaging" and quoted statistics about LGBT youth depression and suicide.** Those statistics are *not* from a study of so-called "conversion therapy" but of a study in San Francisco of "Family Rejection." In addition, there are no outcome-based, scientific studies demonstrating that "sexual orientation change efforts" are harmful. There are simply anecdotal reports on both sides, as with any therapeutic methods.
9. **For four years, proponents have said such talk therapies have been proven to not work.** The truth is, there is great clinical and anecdotal evidence of change from homosexuality and gender dysphoria for many. In addition, there are *no* outcome based studies on youth who have experienced unwanted same-sex attractions and gender dysphoria and sought therapy to resolve their conflicts.
10. **This bill threatens religious freedoms of counselors.** There are no provisions for licensed mental health workers who are Christian to provide counseling in line with their deeply held beliefs about sexual and relational issues.

This is really about competing worldviews. One ideology says homosexuality and transgenderism are innate and unchangeable; only "gay- or transgender-affirming" therapy should be allowed; and all who disagree must be silenced. This is ideology, not science. Research actually

demonstrates a great deal of change and fluidity in both homosexuality and transgenderism.

On the other side is a religious or personal belief that says people should be free to choose to leave homosexuality or transgenderism. Do you support freedom? Or should the state force a certain belief on individuals? Are you tolerant of other viewpoints?

I urge you to vote against this bill and support free speech, religious freedom, parental rights, and client choice. Thank you. I'd be happy to take any questions.

¹ The following organizations represent over 100,000 licensed medical and mental health professionals: American Association of Christian Counselors, The Alliance for Scientific Integrity and Therapeutic Choice, Catholic Medical Association, American College of Pediatricians, International Network of Orthodox (Jewish) Mental Health Professionals, Freedom2Care, and the Christian Medical & Dental Associations.