



Conversion Therapy Ban Testimony House Behavioral Health Committee 6-7-23

Good afternoon! My name is Gwen Stembridge (she/her), and I'm here today testifying on behalf of The Trevor Project, the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people.

We work every day to build a kinder and safer world for LGBTQ young people by providing support through free and confidential 24/7 telephone lifeline, chat, and text platforms in addition to nationally respected research.

To further our mission of ending LGBTQ youth suicide, Trevor is dedicated to seeing the end of conversion therapy which can go by many names but in spirit, it is practitioner-centered instead of patient-centered. It incorporates unethical, unfounded, and impossible goals of changing someone's innate sexual orientation or gender identity and causes irreparable harm to young people. In our opposition to the practice of conversion therapy, we are aligned with every major medical and mental health organization who has rejected these practices as profoundly harmful and founded on unscientific theories that have been debunked for decades.

Trevor also conducts in-depth research into issues affecting the mental health of the youth we serve. Our 2022 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ young surveyed nearly 34,000 respondents between the ages of 13-24, and found that 17% of these youth reported being threatened with or subjected to conversion therapy (11% threatened, 6% subjected to the practice). Tragically, LGBTQ youth who reported being subjected to or threatened with conversion therapy have also attempted suicide at more than twice the rate of their peers who did not, at rates of about 28% vs 11%. You can read more about this in a peer-reviewed article in the American Journal of Public Health.

- In Michigan, The Trevor Project served over 6,000 contacts last year, which we estimate is just a portion of approximately 58,000 LGBTQ youth in Michigan who seriously consider suicide each year. Nationally, many of the young people

that we serve are conversion therapy survivors or are afraid their family members will put them through this.

- Our crisis counselors don't ask about conversion therapy directly when a youth calls us in crisis, but in the last year 1,300 contacts from more than 600 cities across the U.S. explicitly raised the topic themselves.

Far from being arbitrary, similar laws and regulations have consistently been upheld as carefully crafted and narrowly tailored to protect the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ youth, fully consistent with the mandate professional licensing boards are entrusted with to ensure that those who act under the authority of a government issued license offer care that is ethical, evidence-based, and effective. Conversion therapy is none of these things.

There's one more piece of research I have to share. Medical experts have known for decades that conversion therapy contributes to elevated rates of mental health struggles, including depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide attempts. Last year, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Medical Association published an article which used health economics to find the annual direct cost of conversion therapy in the United States is \$650 million. Worse, the indirect costs associated with depression, suicide attempts, etc. totals more than \$8 billion. While it is powerful to hear these harms put in terms of dollars and cents, I am here to remind you that these astronomical figures represent the suffering of individuals, of our friends, neighbors, students, and children.

We all want youth in Michigan to grow up knowing that they are loved, supported, and have every opportunity to thrive.

Thank you.