



Human Rights Committee – Introduced

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Sexual Orientation Conversion Ban Position By Rao

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Position Statement:

SIYAC supports legislation protecting minors from sexuality and gender identity conversion therapy

Position

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation that protects minors in the state of Iowa from mental health practitioners attempting to change their sexuality or gender identity through conversion therapy.

Rationale

According to California law (SB1172), Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) is defined as “any practices by mental health providers that seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation. This includes efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions, or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same sex.” SOCE involves methods aimed solely at converting one’s sexuality or gender identity through psychological or physical means. The issue of SOCE continues to torment lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth across the United States. A study conducted by Dr. Caitlin Ryan, an expert in the field of mental health, showed that “a little more than one-third (34%) [of LGBTQ people] report having been sent outside the home to a therapist or religious leader to ‘cure, treat, or change your sexual orientation’ during their teenage years” (1).

Despite the prevalence of SOCE across the country, scientists have failed to produce evidence that the treatments are effective. The majority of youth exiting SOCE programs face significant mental health issues later on in life. A task force established by the American Psychological Association showed that “Recent studies provide no sound scientific basis for determining the impact of SOCE on decreasing same-sex sexual attraction.” The task force’s work also showed that many who go through SOCE “report experiencing serious distress, including depression, identity, confusion, and fear due to the strong prohibitions of their faith regarding same- sex sexual orientation, behaviors, and relationships.”(2) Samuel Brinton, an Iowa native who underwent conversion therapy in 2000 at an out-of-state conversion program, describes his experience as torturous: “When psychological abuse was not sufficient to change my sexual orientation, my therapist moved to what can only be called physical abuse. My hands were tied down and ice was placed on them while I was shown pictures of men. Later sessions would include copper heating coils, needles in my fingers, and electric shocks. I was supposed to associate the touch of a man with pain. By the end, even hugging my father brought on flashbacks.” Brinton shared this personal testimony with members of SIYAC in a written interview.

Since 2012, California and New Jersey have been the only two states, along with the District of Columbia, to outlaw SOCE practices by mental health and psychiatry practitioners. The decision made by California Senate Bill No. 1172 was upheld in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Pickup vs. Brown*, and the New Jersey Assembly Bill 3317 was upheld in the supreme court case *King vs. Christie*. Seven other states, Hawaii, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Massachusetts are pursuing similar legislation.

Recommended Action

In addition to being scientifically disproven, conversion therapy significantly violates basic human rights. This bill aims to address the protection of minors in Iowa from conversion therapy by registered mental health practitioners. This bill would not affect religious practitioners, religious practices or therapy aimed at self-acceptance, but rather at therapy aimed only at changing a minor’s sexual orientation and gender expression. This bill will help to identify mental health providers who commit proven harmful actions against their patients. Those found guilty of practicing gay conversion therapy will not be criminalized, but rather their license will be reviewed by a professional board, with a punishment determined by said board. By supporting this bill, the state of Iowa would be leading the charge in a human rights issue that plagues thousands of youth across the nation, thus creating a safer environment and community for all youth in Iowa, regardless of sexual orientation.