



Massachusetts House of Representatives
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this written testimony in support of *An Act relative to abusive practices to change sexual orientation and gender identity in minors*, H.140 (Rep. Khan). This bill will protect young people in Massachusetts from dangerous and discredited practices aimed at changing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” ADL has accordingly been a key partner in protecting the civil rights of the LGBTQ community for over 25 years, advocating in federal and state courthouses, as well as in Congress and before state legislatures, around the country.

Sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts, practiced through reparative or conversion therapy, are based on the false claim that being gay or transgender is a mental illness that needs to be cured. This view has been resolutely rejected as scientifically invalid for decades by the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the World Health Organization and other major mental health groups for decades.

Sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts are known to be extremely dangerous and can lead to depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness and even suicidal behavior. Moreover, young people often experience these change efforts as a form of family rejection. Youth who are subject to family rejection, particularly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, are at heightened risk for depression, substance abuse, and suicide. According to Dr. Mirta Roses Periago, Director of the Pan American Health Organization (“PAHO”), Regional Office for the World Health Organization, conversion therapy is “a serious threat to the health and well-being – even the lives – of affected people.”

For decades, our nation has ignored the detrimental effects of conversion therapy on youth, but not anymore. In recent years and months, state legislatures, the White House, and religious organizations have finally joined the medical community in taking action. Currently, fifteen states, as well as the District of Columbia, have banned conversion therapy for LGBTQ youth, including Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut in New England. Additionally, both

the Ninth¹ and Third² Circuits have rejected challenges the California and New Jersey laws, holding that they are a valid exercise of states' authority to protect public health and safety.

Furthermore, in April 2015, President Obama announced his support of state legislative action banning conversion therapy and called upon all 50 states to enact similar legislation. One month later, the Central Conference of American Rabbis ("CCAR") echoed the President's remarks, encouraging CCAR members to "educate their communities and lawmakers" about the harmful effects of conversion therapy.

Medical and mental health professionals should provide care that is ethical, affirming, and culturally competent for young people. No young person should ever be shamed by a medical professional into thinking that who they are is wrong. H.140 puts the well-being of the Commonwealth's youth first. We therefore urge the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities to report out H.140 favorably, and we look forward to continuing to work with members of the Legislature to ensure that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is safe and inclusive for all.

¹ *Pickup v. Brown*, 740 F.3d 1208, 1236 (9th Cir. 2013).

² *King v. Governor of the State of New Jersey*, 767 F.3d 216, 232-33 (3rd Cir. 2014).