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**H.B. 247
House Sponsor Testimony
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Chair Gonzales, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Health and Aging Committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 247.

House Bill 247 aims to prohibit certain health care professionals from practicing conversion therapy for minors. Conversion therapy is considered to be any practice or treatment that seeks to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. It is not evidence-based, nor is it considered to be therapeutic. Rather, conversion therapy is a harmful practice that is detrimental to our families and our children.

Conversion therapy plays a sort of psychological tug-of-war with our children at a pivotal and sensitive time in their lives. They are discovering themselves and experiencing rapid physical and emotional change. Rather than supporting our children during this difficult time, conversion therapy endangers them by portraying their feelings as wrong and making them feel as though their feelings are not valid. Discussions about our children and their futures should be left to informed medical professionals, whose practices are based on proven, evidence-based medical science, not speculative theories and false claims that this type of therapy is good for our kids.

Associations including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American College of Physicians, the American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers, have all taken stances against conversion therapy. These organizations have combined to form the Just the Facts Coalition, which represents more than 475,000 health and mental health professionals. Collectively, they have all determined that homosexuality is not a mental disorder, and therefore is not in need of a cure.¹ In its statement on conversion therapy, the American Psychiatric Association has stated:

¹ <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/just-the-facts.pdf>



“Therefore, the American Psychiatric Association opposes any psychiatric treatment such as reparative or conversion therapy which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the prior assumption that a patient should change his/her sexual homosexual orientation.”²

Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics stated:

“Therapy directed at specifically changing sexual orientation is contraindicated, since it can provoke guilt and anxiety while having little or no potential for achieving changes in orientation.”³

We know that kids are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We know that conversion therapy can do irreparable harm to those who have to suffer through it. And we know that conversion therapy has been discredited by the medical community. We need to stop turning a blind eye as families throughout the state are falling apart and start making the LGBT community feel at home in Ohio. Twenty states have either banned or are debating banning conversion therapy. It is time for Ohio to do the same. And now Rep. Phillips will speak more to why this legislation is so important.

This bill makes it clear that professionals believe that attempting to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity is harmful. It is our hope that by banning so-called conversion therapy by licensed professionals, Ohio can help to raise awareness and promote acceptance and support for young people who are going through a difficult time. Many young people experience rejection by their families as they come out, and suffer significantly as a result. They are at risk. Here are some of the sobering facts:

57% of transgender individuals experience significant family rejection. (**National Transgender Discrimination Survey**)

41% of transgender adults report having ever attempted suicide, compared to 5% of adults in the general population and 10 to 20% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults, according to a U.S. study of almost 6,500 people. (**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, January 2014**)

² American Psychiatric Association, “Position Statement on Therapies Focused on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation (Reparative or Conversion Therapies)”, May 2000.

³ <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/92/4/631.full.pdf>



According to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 19 percent of transgender people had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives specifically because of their gender identity. (**National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 2011**)

About 40% of homeless youth are LGBT and nearly all homeless youth service providers in the U.S. now serve LGBT youth, according to a comprehensive report on LGBT youth homelessness. (**Williams Institute, 2012**)

One in five transgender individuals have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Family rejection and discrimination and violence have contributed to a large number of transgender and other LGBTQ-identified youth who are homeless in the United States – an estimated 20-40% of the more than 1.6 million homeless youth. **National Center for Transgender Equality**

Those statistics should give us pause. This should not be a partisan matter, because we all want to protect youth from assault, homelessness, and the risk of suicide. And beyond that, we want young people to thrive, to be able to develop their talents, and to share their talent with our state and community. That's what makes us strong. I shared the statistics to make sure the committee has the facts about the seriousness of what we're attempting to address with HB 247. But what's really important are the individual people who live in all of our communities, and what this legislation can mean to them.

I asked some people from Athens if they would join us here today. If we have the opportunity to have another hearing on the bill, they would be happy to talk to you about their perspectives about the importance of this legislation. Delfin Bautista is the director of the LGBT Center at Ohio University. They are a survivor of conversion therapy, and can talk about how harmful the practice is. Delfin provides support to youth and young adults in our community, and helps people celebrate their identity and find safety and community at Ohio University.

Jasper Far is here, as well. I have known Jasper since he was a little child. Jasper would be willing to talk with any of you, and posted a video on vimeo to talk about what it means to be transgender. You can find the video here: <https://vimeo.com/157245545> . One of the most compelling things I took from the video is at the end, when Jasper talks about the need for laws to change, and the need for trans people to be treated as people. When discrimination and the threat of violence are reduced, people can get on with their lives and contribute to our communities. Jasper would also be happy to talk with you.



That's really what this bill is about. Licensed professionals have no business telling people that they're wrong about who they love, or their sense of who they are. Growing up is hard enough. If we can take one step to help people find acceptance, to prevent suicide and homelessness within a vulnerable population, and to promote stronger families, we should. This bill is one way to do so. I hope we can move quickly to pass this important legislation to help protect Ohio's LGBT youth.

Chair Gonzales, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Health and Aging Committee, thank you for your time. We can now answer any questions that you may have.