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Senate Health Committee
November 16, 2022
Sponsor Testimony SB 50

Good morning Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani and members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 50, which would prohibit certain licensed healthcare professionals from engaging in conversion therapy when treating minor patients.

Conversion therapy is the harmful, abusive and, most importantly, unproven practice of seeking to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. It can range from acts of psychological abuse to even physical harm like electrocution. Often, patients are subjected to painful sensations while being exposed to a stimulus related to their sexuality in an attempt to force them to develop a negative association. These harmful practices use rejection, shame and abuse to force people - specifically young people - to try to change who they are.

Conversion therapy does not work and is often deeply traumatizing for those who undergo it, especially for minors whose brains are still in development. It enforces the idea that they should be ashamed of who they are and can lead to lower self-esteem, depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts.

Sexual orientation is not a disorder, nor is it pathological. The perception as such can lead to increased depression and greater suicide risks. LGBTQ youth are already five times more likely to attempt suicide than the general youth population, and researchers largely agree that this disparity can be at least partially attributed to the social stigmas and discrimination that LGBTQ youth face.

Further, conversion therapy has been widely discredited by medical and psychological professionals as causing unnecessary harm to those who undergo it. The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, American Counseling Association, American Psychiatric Association, National Association of Social Workers, United Nations Human Rights Council and many other respected medical organizations have all taken stances against the practice of conversion therapy.

Currently, 20 states and the District of Columbia ban conversion therapy for minors, 6 partially ban it, and 21 have no state law or policy, including Ohio.ⁱ A growing number of cities in Ohio have instituted bans on conversion therapy for minors. Last month, Akron banned the practice, joining 11 other cities such as Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, Reynoldsburg, Cincinnati, Lakewood, Columbus, Dayton and Toledo.

We cannot allow one more person to be targeted by these dangerous and discredited practices. Banning conversion therapy will protect Ohio's youth from harm and affirm that being LGBTQ+ is not a disorder that can be treated, but rather something completely natural and valid.

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani and members of the Committee, we appreciate your attention to this important issue. Thank you and we are happy to respond to questions at this time.

ⁱ https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy