



November 25, 2019

Kurt Eggebrecht
Director of Public Health
100 North Appleton Street
Appleton, WI 54911-4799

Dear Director Eggebrecht:

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) is pleased to support the local ordinance banning the practice of conversion therapy in the City of Appleton. Conversion therapy, sometimes referred to as “reparative therapy, consists of several harmful and discredited practices focused on changing an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Practitioners of conversion therapy utilize an array of shaming, emotionally traumatic, or physical painful stimuli to force their victims to associate those stimuli with their LGBTQ identities. Studies estimate that over 700,000 LGBTQ people have been subjected to these harmful practices and that 80,000 LGBTQ youth will experience this conduct in the future, often due to well-intentioned but misguided parents or caretakers.

Conversion therapy is based on the false premise that a person’s identification as LGBTQ is the product of a mental illness that can be cured, despite the fact that all major medical associations have determined that LGBTQ identities are a completely normal and positive part of human nature. Furthermore, no credible scientific study has supported the claims of conversion therapists that they can change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. In fact, the American Psychoanalytic Association stated, “Psychoanalytic technique does not encompass purposeful attempts to ‘convert,’ ‘repair,’ change or shift an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such directed efforts are against fundamental principles of psychoanalytic treatment and often result in substantial psychological pain by reinforcing damaging internalized attitudes.”

In addition to the lack of support for the claims for the efficacy of conversion therapy, there is ample evidence to support the contention that these practices are harmful. The American Psychiatric Association has determined that “the potential risks of reparative therapy are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior,” and that therapists who utilize these practices align with societal prejudices that exacerbate shame and stigma many LGBTQ youth already experience. It is difficult to comprehend any practice more harmful to LGBTQ youth than attempts to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Over the past several years, 18 states and numerous municipalities have prohibited the practice of conversion therapy on youth. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of the United States has upheld or refused to hear challenges to the laws in several states, thus upholding rulings affirming the constitutionality of these laws. In Wisconsin, several municipalities have enacted ordinances prohibiting conversion therapy, and legislation is currently pending in the legislature which would do so on a statewide level.

Conversion therapy relies on many of the harmful stereotypes the anti-sexual violence movement challenges. In fact, gender socialization is one of the social norms WCASA has identified that contribute to sexual violence. Gender socialization is when people interpret social norms and internalize expectations about masculinity and femininity. This reinforces discrimination against LGBTQ people because they do not conform to traditional norms of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, as discussed above, the impacts of conversion therapy on LGBTQ youth are similar to those who experience sexual violence, including shame, depression, and self-



destructive behavior.

WCASA has long supported the work of organizations like Diverse and Resilient, who is leading the efforts to enact this ordinance in Appleton. We are grateful for their leadership and expertise when advocating for this conversion therapy ban, and we hope the City of Appleton will join other municipalities in Wisconsin and across the nation in prohibiting these harmful practices. If you could please forward this correspondence to the City of Appleton Board of Health that would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Pennie Meyers', is positioned below the text 'Thank you for your consideration,'.

Pennie Meyers
Executive Director
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault