

Dear Mayor Gorton & Honorable Councilmembers,

On behalf of Ban Conversion Therapy Kentucky, I enthusiastically write in support of Lexington's proposed endeavor to ban licensed mental health professionals from engaging in what is known as 'conversion therapy' upon Lexington's kids and teens. Ban Conversion Therapy Kentucky is an actively nonpartisan 501(c)3 nonprofit with the mission to raise awareness and pass legislation that will protect Kentucky's kids from the dangerous and discredited practice of conversion "torture" therapy since 2017. Our organization is thrilled to see Lexington rise to the need to protect Lexington's parents and kids from this legal form of child abuse.

Conversion "therapy", also known as sexual orientation/gender identity change efforts, is a term used to describe practices that claim to change a gay person into a straight person or to prevent a person from being transgender. According to the American Psychological Association, techniques used in these efforts may include inducing vomiting; administering electric shocks; imposing self-infliction of pain when aroused by same-sex images; using shame to create an aversion to same-sex attractions; using hypnosis to try to redirect desires and arousal; and more.

Those who engage in conversion torture use tactics typically grounded in antiquated and widely discredited beliefs that parents are at fault for their children's sexual orientation or gender identity. Nearly every recognized health professional association in the country and Kentucky has concluded that efforts to change a person's sexual orientation are both ineffective and extremely risky.

In short, these practices do not work, and they can cause life-threatening harm to minors. The suicide attempt rate for young people, in general, is alarmingly high, with 19% of high school-age young people reporting serious suicidal thoughts, and 9% attempting suicide. When surveying only LGBTQ-identifying young people, the rate of those attempting suicide jumps to 17%. For those young people exposed to conversion "therapy," the rate of those attempting suicide is a shattering 42%. A poll by the Trevor Project surveyed 34,000 LGBTQ youth found that LGBTQ youth who underwent conversion therapy were more than twice as likely to attempt suicide in the past 12 months compared to their LGBTQ peers who did not report undergoing conversion therapy.

The goal of conversion therapy is to cause harm by using physical, emotional, and psychological tactics known to be abuse in an attempt to convince kids and teens that they should be castigated for feeling a certain way. When someone uses the credibility of their license to tell a child that they should be ashamed of themselves, to isolate themselves for being themselves, to self-harm for being different-no matter what the identity of the child might be, we know this type of abuse and bullying does cause harm.

We know conversion therapy is used right here in Kentucky, including in the city of Lexington. During our work, our organization has heard from countless parents and survivors who were impacted by the harm caused through conversion therapy. Some of these survivors have come forward to courageously share their stories with us and the people of Kentucky. We have read about the experience of those who survived conversion therapy. **Kentuckians from across the state who have bravely relieved their trauma and told their stories in hope that our government leaders will step up to say: not one more child.**

BCTK is often asked about what the implications regarding bans on conversion therapy and the First Amendment might be. Legislation that seeks to ban pastors, clergy, or other faith leaders from giving religious advice based on

their sincerely held beliefs is a violation of Section One of the Kentucky Constitution and the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. **Both local and state legislation that seeks to ban conversion therapy is punctiliously drafted to be narrowly tailored, to serve a compelling government interest, and is created by utilizing the least restrictive means. Bans on conversion therapy may only impact minors and may only be applied to licensed professions, which the Lexington proposed legislation follows this same immutable rule.**

Many states, cities, and municipalities have passed similar bans across the United States. 20 states have passed bans on conversion therapy, including our sister Commonwealth of Virginia. Many of these bans were challenged on grounds that it violated religious liberty or free speech, and all but one has failed. **There are more than 85 conversions “therapy” bans nationwide, most and almost all have been upheld by courts across the country.** BCTK shares the same goal and a strong interest to protect the First Amendment for all Kentuckians, including those who may disagree with us. **After all, the First Amendment is what gives those who fight for civil rights a sword and shield, protecting us as we stand up for equality.**


Kentuckians and Lexingtonians are ready to ban conversion therapy. A statewide poll commissioned by BCTK in January 2021 shows that 74% of all Kentuckians oppose conversion torture. The same poll showed that 60% of all Kentuckians disagree that parents should have the right to compel their child to endure conversion therapy. Additionally, the poll found that a majority of those who identify as Protestant, Evangelical, Catholic support a ban on conversion therapy.

When asked about her inspiration for filing the current proposed ban on conversion in the Kentucky Senate, Senator Alice Forgy Kerr, a Republican from Fayette, stated “In my Christian faith, I am taught that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made, wonderfully made, and I believe that very strongly. Pro-life means doing everything I can to protect our youth from suicide and from being rejected and being taught that they are not good enough.”

At Ban Conversion Therapy Kentucky, we agree with Senator Forgy Kerr. We must do everything we can to protect our youth from abuse-whether physical, emotional, or psychological-and from any manipulation that is known to cause suicide. We are thrilled to see Lexington’s Mayor and Councilmembers take up the issue of conversion therapy. It is the hope of BCTK, Kentuckians, and Lexingtonians that honorable members of this council will pass the proposed ban on conversion therapy to bring relief to those who have suffered and prevent a new generation of kids from being harmed by this form of torture.

We are grateful for your consideration and attention. Please let us know if we can be of any assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Frazier". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Michael Frazier

Legislative Action & Government Affairs Director
Ban Conversion Therapy Kentucky, INC.