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March 1, 2021

Dear Members of the General Government and Social Services Committee,

I am writing to offer my strongest support for the proposed LGBT Youth Mental Health Protection Ordinance. This ordinance would ban a practice that has been widely discredited by all major medical and psychological organizations as both ineffective and inhumane, and we have no place for such practices in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. I will first briefly detail my qualifications for this statement and then outline specifically why conversion therapy should be officially banned.

I am the Lester and Helen Milich Professor of Children at Risk at the University of Psychology and the founding Director of the Center for Equality and Social Justice. I earned my Ph.D. in developmental psychology at The University of Texas at Austin and my research expertise focuses on gender and gender identity development in children and adolescents. I am a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, have published more than 85 publications in scientific journals and published three books about gender development, and regularly consult with toy and media companies, parent groups, schools, and the ACLU on issues around gender development. I also helped found the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression caucus of the Society for Research in Child Development, the largest organization of developmental scientists in the world.

From this area of expertise, I can clearly state that conversion therapy is, at best ineffective at changing anyone's sexual orientation or gender identity, but is more importantly extremely damaging to their psychological well-being and physical health. It is important to be clear that the American Psychological Association has long known that "same-sex sexual attractions, behavior, and orientations are *normal* and *positive* variants of human sexuality—in other words, they do not indicate either mental or developmental disorders." Thus, trying to change normal variations of human diversity is based on a flawed premise from the outset. More importantly, however, studies have shown that conversion efforts for sexual orientation are associated with individuals being at an increased risk for depression, being more likely to have suicidal thoughts, having lower self-esteem, and showing a greater likelihood of developing substance use problems (Ryan et al., 2018). Similar findings occur for conversion efforts for gender identity (i.e., focused on trans individuals). Conversion efforts are associated with increased suicidal thoughts and attempts at suicide and severe psychological distress (Turbin et al., 2019).

Thus, most experts on gender and sexual orientation have concluded that conversion therapy directly contributes to suicidal thoughts and attempts by people subjected to it. This is too high a price to pay for an outdated and discredited attempt to change an individual's biologically



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determined identity. If there are any additional questions I can address, I can be contacted at christia.brown@uky.edu or 859-257-6827.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Christia'.

Christia Spears Brown, Ph.D.
Lester and Helen Milich Professor of Children at Risk
Associate Chair, Department of Psychology
Director, Center for Equality and Social Justice