

FROM THE DESK OF
WANDA MCCANTS, LPCC-S

March 7, 2021

Re: LGBT Youth Mental Health Protection

To Whom It Does Concern:

My name is Wanda McCants and I passionately serve my community as a licensed professional clinical counselor. I specialize in areas focusing on issues concerning People of Color and LGBTQ+ individuals. Because I live in both categories and was born and raised in Alabama, this ordinance holds especial meaning for me.

Therapy is a difficult process for anyone to endure, in particular youth who identify as LGBTQ+ in a non-affirming environment. I specifically note practices in mental health facilities that appear to be welcoming, but are threatening to incoming patients. Conversion or reparative therapy is a harmful, discredited approach driven by the assertion that heterosexuality and a binary gender status are the only acceptable identities in which a person can assume in life. However, its intentions are based on the misguided belief that sexual orientation and gender identity are a choice that can be changed. As a private practice owner and therapist, I want to ensure my clients are affirmed and feel confident in their own skin upon leaving a session. Kentucky currently has 57 conversion therapy practitioners, of which seven operate in Fayette County. This is an unsettling number of people who see mental health as a method of correcting a person's identity to fit a heterosexist mold instead of a collaborative relationship aimed at empowering an individual to honor themselves and reach their highest potential.

Nearly 30,000 LGBTQ+ youth in Kentucky would be put at higher risk for suicide attempts, self harm, substance abuse, and homelessness if not for advocates and allies working towards dismantling destructive practices that only serve to diminish our youth's well-being. Conversion therapies have largely been disproved and denounced by every mental health organization including (not limited to) the American Counseling Association, American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry, and American Medical Association. Along with these organizations, 20 states plus the District of Columbia have banned conversion therapy for minors. It is without question that our government official and community leaders need to ensure our youth are protected from the dangers of conversion therapies in lieu of being bystanders while these practices continue.

All communities look to the youth as leaders and change agents who carry out values into the future. Our values represent what we want to project to our community - you are accepted, supported, and valued for who you are as your authentic self.

With regards,

Wanda McCants, LPCC-S