

March 2, 2021

Mayor Linda Gorton and the Urban County Council
200 E Main St
Lexington KY 40507

Dear Mayor Gorton and Members of Council,

On behalf of Free Mom Hugs-Kentucky, we thank you for taking this time to consider the Youth Mental Health Act for Lexington.

Free Mom Hugs is known nationwide for offering hugs, unconditional love and celebration for the LGBTQIA community, especially at Pride Festivals, but also at various other community events. We see first hand the joy that comes from simply saying "You are perfect. You are amazing. You are loved." We also see the harm that has been caused to those who have been rejected by the people who should love them the most. We have held people in our arms who haven't had a hug from a parent in years, sometimes decades. We have sat with young people while they share their stories of rejection, often with tears streaming down their faces.

Young LGBTQIA people who are rejected by their family experience higher rates of depression, drug use, homelessness, and attempted suicide than LGBTQIA youth with affirming family. Efforts to change a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity are unscientific and dangerous. In fact, studies show that 42% of LGBTQIA youth who have been subjected to the harmful methods of conversion therapy attempt suicide within a year. That goes up to 57% for transgender youth. *To be clear, they are not at higher risk of suicide because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. They are at a higher risk because of the rejection and discrimination that is compounded by conversion therapy.*

Some members of council have expressed they would like to see what the state legislature does regarding the Youth Mental Health Act before acting here in Lexington. *We should not and cannot afford to wait for Frankfort to set the example. Lexington must set the example for Frankfort.* We must show our state lawmakers what protecting vulnerable young people looks like.

While we know the Youth Mental Health Act cannot legislate that parents love their children for who they are, it is important to say we will not accept predatory practitioners causing further damage in the name of "therapy." Conversion Therapy is torture, which is why every professional medical and psychological organization in the United States has spoken out against it. **Passing this measure in Lexington can and will save lives.** Please pass the Youth Mental Health Act.

Sincerely,

Free Mom Hugs-Kentucky

Robin Parker, Chapter Leader

Jess Bowman, Chapter Vice President & Lexington Coordinator

Nicole Hudson, Lexington Coordinator

Nicole DeZarn, Chapter Secretary

Teresa White, Marylee Camp, Carrie Hagan, Louisville Coordinators

Lisa Morrow & Heather Huber, Somerset Coordinators

Shannon Nichols, Frankfort Coordinator

And over 500 volunteers of Free Mom Hugs-Kentucky including Anthony Hudson, Phil & Sharon Preece, Terry, Aiden and Evan Parker