



Kentucky's Children and Youth Must Be Protected

Louisville, February 8, 2023 - A bill to ban conversion “therapy” in Kentucky - HB 162 - was filed late yesterday by Representative Lisa Willner (D, Louisville) with Representative Killian Timoney (R, Lexington) as primary co-sponsor. This bipartisan bill, The Youth Mental Health Protection Act, would prohibit all licensed mental health providers from engaging in any practices that purport to change a minor’s sexual orientation or gender identity. The bill would also prohibit any agency that provides these harmful practices or refers minors to them from receiving state funding.

The [Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children](#) strongly encourages legislators and the public to protect our most vulnerable children and youth from outdated, discredited, and unscientific practices like conversion “therapy” which cause harm.

As the Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children has stated in its [2023 Children’s Mental Health Legislative Agenda](#), “Conversion therapy is the practice of harmful interventions that seek to “cure” or suppress the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of a person. It has been proven to significantly increase rates of suicidality and other self-harming behaviors, decrease a sense of self-esteem, as well as negatively impact school attendance and academic performance.”



The American Academy of Pediatrics, the country’s leading authority on pediatric healthcare, along with the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association and [many other medical, mental health and child advocacy organizations](#) urge ending conversion therapy because of the harm it causes youth. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) has clearly stated that the AACAP “finds no evidence to support the application of any “therapeutic intervention” operating under the premise that a specific sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression is pathological. Furthermore, based on the scientific evidence, the AACAP asserts that such “conversion therapies” (or other interventions imposed with the intent of promoting a particular sexual orientation and/or gender as a preferred outcome) lack scientific credibility and clinical

utility. Additionally, there is evidence that such interventions are harmful. As a result, “conversion therapies” should not be part of any behavioral health treatment of children and adolescents.”

The Trevor Project’s 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 13% of LGBT+ youth reported being subjected to conversion therapy, with 83% reporting it occurred when they were under age 18, and that LGBTQ youth who underwent conversion therapy were more than twice as likely to report having attempted suicide and more than 2.5 times as likely to report multiple suicide attempts in the past year. In a more [recent study](#) published in May 2022 in JAMA Pediatrics multinational research found that the practice of conversion therapy on LGBTQ youth, and its associated effects, cost the United States an estimated \$9.23 billion annually and untold harm to thousands of LGBTQ+ youth.

In Kentucky, prominent professional health and mental health organizations, including the Kentucky Medical Association, the Kentucky Psychological Association, the Kentucky Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Kentucky Mental Health Coalition, and the Foundation for A Healthy Kentucky, among 100 other Kentucky organizations have opposed the use of conversion therapy on kids, calling the practice harmful and ineffective.

Dr. Christopher Bolling, a member of the Coalition’s Steering Committee, noted “On behalf of The Kentucky Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and as a primary pediatrician in Kentucky for over thirty years, I am in favor of Representative Willner’s proposed bill to ban so-called ‘conversion therapy’. This debunked treatment further exacerbates our statewide mental health crisis and puts Kentucky youth at risk.”

Rep. Lisa Willner, the bill sponsor and the only licensed mental health professional in the Kentucky General Assembly states, “I’m grateful for the broad and diverse coalition that has come together to call for an end to the too-often deadly practice of conversion ‘therapy.’ A license to provide mental health services ought to be, at the bare minimum, a guarantee to the public that the provider is not engaging in discredited and dangerous practices.”

About the Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children

The Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children, with a [Steering Committee](#) of 37 diverse organization and over 140 members, is committed to work collaboratively on policies and that promote equity and improve the physical, social and emotional health and well-being of children, youth and families.