

Judiciary Committee
House Bill 1209
Favorable

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee;

Conversion therapy is cruel and extremely harmful. About 20 years ago, I attended a protest against conversion therapy. I heard the experiences of young people who had been so severely injured by conversion therapy that they attempted suicide. I heard from some that they knew people who had committed suicide due to their parents' rejection of them and the damage done by conversion "therapists."

Twenty-six years ago, I lost a friend who was like a brother to me. R jumped to his death from his dorm window. He had tried to come out to his parents over the phone as bisexual, as a way to ease them into eventually accepting him when he would come out as gay. He was rejected, and killed himself shortly after. He was barely an adult. Had he still been a minor when he came out, they undoubtedly would have forced R into conversion therapy. If R had lived any longer, I have no doubt that R's parents would have pressured him into conversion therapy and threatened to withhold their love and support if he refused. I met his mother when she traveled almost 4,000 miles to get her son's body and his belongings. She was convinced that another friend of mine (J), who had been (platonically) helping R navigate his feelings, had made her son gay. She blamed J for R's death. She seemed much more upset about R coming out than about him dying. I have never forgiven her for not loving her child unconditionally.

People who torture others under the guise of "therapy" shouldn't have a right to practice any sort of mental health care. They absolutely should be held responsible for the mental anguish they cause, and they should be punished. Mental health professionals are supposed to be held to a standard of care. That standard doesn't include forcing people to conform to their parents' or churches bigoted ideals. It doesn't include making people suicidal, teaching them that their lives are expendable if they aren't cisgender or heterosexual. That's 100% malpractice.

Please give House Bill 1209 a favorable report. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Debi Jasen
Pasadena, MD