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Representative Peter Fisher
Chairman of the House Human Services
Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

January 18, 2023

Chairman Fisher,

I am unable to attend the hearing today on H.F. No. 16 and since I strongly believe this bill should become law in MN I am submitting the attached testimony. I am available to provide further information if necessary.

Respectfully,
Patricia K Lynch, MSW, LICSW

My name is Patricia K Lynch, MSW, LICSW and I have a private practice providing behavioral health services in Rochester, MN. I am submitting this testimony to express my unequivocal support for H.F. No. 16 Protection From Conversion Therapy. The bill aims to ensure that LGBTQ+ individuals receive mental health care that is affirming, culturally competent, ethical, nonjudgmental, and nurturing. To achieve that goal, this bill will ban the practice of therapies known as **conversion/reparative or sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE)** in MN with individuals younger than 18 years of age or with a vulnerable adult as defined in Section 616.5572, subdivision 21. A ban on the use of those interventions with such individuals is essential because of the emotional and psychological harm caused by the derogatory, hurtful, and oppressive approach used to change and/or influence a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender presentation.

I have been licensed as a clinical social worker for almost 30 years. One of my areas of expertise is providing affirmative behavioral health care to individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. Physical and behavioral health providers, school and county social workers and other therapists in southeastern MN often refer individuals to me because I honor and understand the special emotional, psychological, and social needs of persons who identify as LGBTQ+.

Conversion/reparative therapy and COCE has been discredited or highly criticized by all major medical, psychiatric, psychological, and professional mental health organizations including, but not limited to, **The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, The National Association of Social Workers, and the World Psychiatric Association.** My professional organization, The National Association of Social Workers, not only prohibits practice that includes any form of conversion therapy and SOCE, but it also bars social work practitioners from referring clients to practitioners or programs that use conversion/reparative therapy and/or any form of SOCE. (NASW, 2014).

Proponents of conversion/reparative therapy wrongly suggest the practice is aimed at encouraging people to be who they are, however; the true focus is on convincing LGBTQ+ individuals, through criticism and shame, that their sexual orientation or gender non-conforming identity is a form of mental illness, and it must be changed. Such an approach runs counter to the task of behavioral health providers whose responsibilities include encouraging resilience, promoting autonomy, and assisting LGBTQ+ people to love and value their authentic self.

Individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ often seek therapy because of negative and prejudicial societal judgements about people who do not conform to mainstream social norms. Persons may develop gender dysphoria which results in symptoms of anxiety and depression, social isolation, stigmatization, elevated levels of suicidal ideation and attempts, chemical dependency, and traumatization. Psychologically those conditions are most effectively treated with therapeutic approaches aimed at decreasing isolation, affirming the experiences and feelings of those in need, increasing self-acceptance and self-compassion and validating and processing past trauma.

The LGBTQ+ individuals I assist often relate a life of emotional pain driven by their internal desire and external pressure to be someone other than who they are. Their human need to be accepted, cherished, loved, and validated can be obtained by affirmative care because it is accepting, loving, and validating. Please pass the Protection from Conversion Therapy bill to ensure that LGBTQ+ individuals under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults residing in MN receive the best mental health care we have to offer.