

Comments to the Human Services Policy Committee of the MN House of Representatives
Rev. Chris McArdle, Pastor, First Congregational Church UCC of Anoka
Wednesday, January 18, 2023

Thank you Chair Fischer and Committee Members for the opportunity to testify today in support of HF16. I am the Rev. Chris McArdle, pastor of First Congregational Church in Anoka.

I speak to you today as a straight, cisgender, ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, but I do not speak for all Christians; I speak at the behest of my congregation which celebrates LGBTQIA+ persons as beloved, whole children of God. But I don't want you to vote on this bill based on religious arguments; I simply want you to recognize that the Church is far from monolithic on this subject.

My education and experience indicate that Christians who support conversion therapy tend to do so on a narrow misunderstanding of a handful of brief passages in the Bible that lead them to perpetrate violence against their neighbors. I assure you that every one of these Bible passages is at best ambiguous in their meaning, and to claim they speak authoritatively about queer people is to force modern prejudices onto an ancient context. In fact, historians have discovered that the word "homosexual" was included in the Bible's Revised Standard Version by mistake.

In my time as a pastor, I have cared for people who have survived conversion therapy in its many forms, from private therapy all the way to the horror known as "corrective rape" wherein gay children are sexually assaulted in order to "cure" them. No matter the form in which conversion therapy comes, it is harmful, as health professionals remind us. Other Christians may claim otherwise, but my faith assures me that our diverse sexualities and genders are beautiful in God's eyes.

I urge you to reject such prejudice. Embrace the best practices of our health sector. Vote in favor of HF16 and finally ban the destructive practice of conversion therapy for minors. Thank you for your time.

There are countless scholarly articles available on this subject, but here are three resources for your further reading that touch upon topics I have referenced.

"How a Bible Error Changed History and Turned Gays into Pariahs"
<https://tinyurl.com/yc38zutk>

"What Does the Bible Say about Homosexuality?" <https://tinyurl.com/8prfs3fs>

"It's Torture Not Therapy" (A Global Overview of Conversion Therapy: Practices, Perpetrators, and the Role of States) <https://tinyurl.com/ycbcxxa3>