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**PLEASE OPPOSE HF16 (HOLLINS) "CHILDREN OR VULNERABLE ADULT
CONVERSION THERAPY PROHIBITED..."**

Testimony of Andre Van Mol, MD

"Conversion Therapy" bans against counseling choice are one-sided ideology that would place us squarely against the tide of science, evidence-based health care, client autonomy, free speech, and the therapist-client relationship. Bans are failing in court challenges.

"Conversion therapy" is a pejorative, misrepresentative, provocative, and vague phrase spawned by opponents in 1991.ⁱ In reality, it is client-initiated and client-directed talk therapy -- just talk-- with licensed therapists working with willing and motivated people.

Numerous mental health, medical, and social science organizations oppose counseling bans.ⁱⁱ Contrary to claims otherwise, there is support for such counseling.

Counseling Bans are Needless.

- Complaints of harmful practice and clinician malfeasance are addressed by appointed licensed mental health professionals on state licensing boards. Where are the verified, documented harms from (and the subsequent penalties issued to) specific licensed change-allowing therapists?
- According to a counseling-hostile piece in the professional literature, "As of this writing, to our knowledge, there have been no formal actions by a regulatory body against a provider for engaging in conversion therapy."ⁱⁱⁱ

Counseling bans deprive adults and children of the freedom to set their own counseling goals and objectives, and will likely drive some children and adults to suicide by forbidding counseling for underlying issues.

- The *APA Handbook on Sexuality and Psychology* specifically warns against a rush to only affirm: "it is critically important for clinicians...to allow individuals to determine for themselves the role of same-sex sexuality in their lives and identity" (v.1, p. 257).^{iv}

- The American Psychological Association's Handbook on Sexuality and Psychology^v and numerous studies acknowledge that childhood sexual abuse can cause unwanted homosexuality in some individuals.^{vi vii}
- If this ban passes, children and adults may be unable to heal these wounds, and can be left without hope and suicidal as a result.

Professional Psychological & Psychiatric Associations have stated that homosexuality can be changeable and is not immutable.

- The 2014 APA Handbook states that sexual orientation may change over a person's lifetime especially during adolescence.^{viii}
- The APA's Dr. Lisa Diamond concluded "...arguments based on the immutability of sexual orientation are unscientific, given what we now know..."^{ix}
- The UK's Royal College of Psychiatrists declared in 2014: "sexual orientation is determined by a combination of biological and postnatal environmental factors" ... "[it] is not the case that sexual orientation is immutable or might not vary to some extent in a person's life..." Numerous studies concur.^{x xi xii}

There is no evidence of harm from modern sexual orientation change-allowing counseling provided by licensed professionals.^{xiii xiv xv xvi xvii xviii} Decades of supportive studies exist.^{xix xx xxi xxii xxiii}

Common Failings of Anti-Counseling Studies:^{xxiv}

- Rarely define the pejorative term "conversion therapy" with any precision.
- Routinely muddy the waters by combining simple pastoral or other ill-defined spiritual counseling with actual counseling by licensed clinicians.
- Assume a simplistic "affirmation" versus "conversion" false dichotomy.
- Use survey designs (notably convenience sampling of exclusively LGBTQ+ organizations, clubs and venues) that assure the exclusion of those who benefitted from therapy, among other weaknesses.^{xxv}
 - Convenience sampling creates low-quality data.^{xxvi}
- Violate temporal precedence, committing the "correlation as causation" fallacy.
 - Correlating lifetime harm and suicidality to temporally **un**placed exposure to therapy, rather than comparing pre- and post-counseling mental health even when such data is present.

Change-Allowing Counseling (so-called "Conversion Therapy") Has Not Been Shown Harmful, But Beneficial in Recent Major Studies.

- The habitually misquoted American Psychological Association's Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 2009 report stated specifically that modern change allowing counseling "since 1978" was "nonaversive," meaning free of pain or shame infliction (p.43), and that research meeting scientific standards did not allow attributing harm or help, inefficacy or efficacy to change-allowing counseling (pp. 43,82).^{xxvii} Harm has not been established.

- A 2021 study by Prof. Paul Sullins revealed that **change-allowing counseling strongly reduced suicidality**. “Experiencing SOCE [sexual orientation change efforts] therapy does not encourage higher suicidality, as they claim; rather, experiencing higher suicidality appears to encourage recourse to SOCE, which in turn strongly reduces suicidality, particularly initial suicide attempts. Restrictions on SOCE deprive sexual minorities of an important resource for reducing suicidality, putting them at substantially increased suicide risk.”^{xxviii xxix}
- A 2021 prospective study (Pela & Sutton) showed “...that exploring sexual attraction fluidity in **therapy can be effective, beneficial, and not harmful**,” and that “It is no longer true that there is no scientific evidence concerning whether SAFE-T is helpful or harmful.”^{xxx}
- A 2022 study (Sullins) constituting a “stress test” of the counseling “harm” hypothesis found that **even people who failed change-allowing counseling for undesired same-sex desires “did not suffer higher psychological or social harm”** and that “Concerns to restrict or ban SOCE due to elevated harm are unfounded.”^{xxxi}
- A 2022 study (Schumm) confirmed “Harms from SOCE seem to be minimal compared to the positives reported for young adults.”^{xxxii} Additionally, even for study subjects whose same-sex identification and behavior became stronger, they “nevertheless reported high levels of helpfulness for SOCE.”

As American constitutional law catches up to counseling bans, they are falling. The city of Tampa, Florida lost in court in *Vazzo v Tampa*.^{xxxiii} Another city lost in *Otto, et al v. City of Boca Raton, Florida et al*, in the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals.^{xxxiv} New York City withdrew its therapy ban when challenged, fearing a loss in higher court.^{xxxv} Other cases are underway.

Please oppose HF16 (Hollins) “Children or vulnerable adult conversion therapy prohibited...”



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ⁱ Haldeman, D. (1991). Sexual orientation conversion therapy for gay men and lesbians: A scientific examination. In J. Gonsiorek & J. Weinrich (Eds.), *Homosexuality: Research Implications for Public Policy* (pp. 149-160). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

ⁱⁱ Medical, social science, and mental health organizations opposing bans on therapy for unwanted same-sex attraction or gender identity. <https://iftcc.org/re-source/medical->

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^{iv} *APA Handbook on Sexuality and Psychology* (American Psychological Association, 2014). V.1, Mustanski, Kuper, & Greene, p.257.

^v Mustaky, B., Kuper, L., and Geene, G. (2014). Chapter 19: Development of sexual orientation and identity. In Tolman, D., & Diamond, L., Co-Editors-in-Chief (2014). *APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1: 609-610.

^{vi} Tomeo, M.E., Templer, D. I., Anderson, S., & Kotler, D. (2001). Comparative Data of Childhood and Adolescence Molestation in Heterosexual and Homosexual Persons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 30(5), 535-541.

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^{viii} *APA Handbook on Sexuality and Psychology* (American Psychological Association, 2014) V.1, p.636.

^{ix} Diamond, LM; Rosky, CJ; "Scrutinizing Immutability: Research on Sexual Orientation and U.S. Legal Advocacy for Sexual Minorities." *Annals of Sex Research*. 00(00), 1-29, 2016.

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^{xi} Ott, MQ, et al., "Stability and Change in Self-Reported Sexual Orientation Identity in Young People: Application of Mobility Metrics." *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. June 2011; Vol. 40, Iss. 3: 519-312.

^{xii} Christine E. Kaestle (2019) Sexual Orientation Trajectories Based on Sexual Attractions, Partners, and Identity: A Longitudinal Investigation From Adolescence Through Young Adulthood Using a U.S. Representative Sample, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 56:7, 811-826, DOI: [10.1080/00224499.2019.1577351](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1577351)

^{xiii} Sexual Orientation Change Efforts Do Not Lead to Increased Suicide Attempts (Summary of excerpt from Whitehead, N.) (2010). *Homosexuality and Co-Morbidities: Research and Therapeutic Implications*. *Journal of Human Sexuality*, 2, 125-176).

^{xiv} A.D. Byrd, Joseph Nicolosi, and R.W. Potts (February 2008), "Clients' Perceptions of How Reorientation Therapy and Self-Help Can Promote Changes in Sexual Orientation," *Psychological Reports* 102, pp. 3-28.

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^{xvii} *Essential Psychopathology and Its Treatment*, Third Ed, Maxmen, War, and Kilgus (W.W. Norton & Co.).

^{xviii} Christopher H. Rosik (2019): RE: Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, and Russell (2018), *Journal of Homosexuality*, DOI: [10.1080/00918369.2019.1656506](https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1656506).

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- ^{xxii} *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*, Jeffrey Satinover (Baker Books, 1996) pp. 179-195.
- ^{xxiii} *Successful Outcomes of Sexual Orientation Change Efforts*, James E. Phelan (Phelan Consultants LLC, 2014).
- ^{xxiv} Andre Van Mol, "Evidence Opposing Therapy Bans," CMDA's The Point, Aug. 26, 2021. <https://cmda.org/evidence-opposing-therapy-bans/>
- ^{xxv} Gideon's *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences* warns, "you cannot make statistical generalizations from research that relies on convenience sampling[.]" and "Convenience sampling is to be avoided always in survey research." But critics don't.
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- ^{xxviii} Paul Sullins, SEXUAL ORIENTATION CHANGE EFFORTS (SOCE) REDUCE SUICIDE: CORRECTING A FALSE RESEARCH NARRATIVE, Pre-print researchgate.net, March 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350124048_SEXUAL_ORIENTATION_CHANGE_EFFORTS_SOCE_REDUCES_SUICIDE_CORRECTING_A_FALSE_RESEARCH_NARRATIVE?enrichId=rgreq-610bacc159836fbb103f4eefce465664-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXIjQYWdlOzM1MDEyNDA0ODtBUzoxMDAyNDI4NDcyMjMzOTg2QDE2MTYwMDg5ODA0NDc%3D&el=1_x_2&esc=publicationCoverPdf
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