

**HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN**

House Committee on Public Health Care & Human Services Policy
Colorado General Assembly
200 E Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

January 31, 2019

Re: SUPPORT for HB 19-1129, Testimony from the Human Rights Campaign in support of the bill to protect minors in Colorado from the harmful practice of conversion therapy

Dear Chairperson Singer and Members of the Committee:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), on behalf of its more than 162,000 members and supporters in Colorado, thanks you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 19-1129, a vital measure that will protect young people in Colorado from dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. We urge you to consider and swiftly pass this important legislation, that address

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. As an advocate for LGBTQ young people, HRC believes that no young person should be coerced or subjected to dangerous practices that lack legitimate medical purpose, such as conversion therapy.

Conversion therapy, sometimes referred to as "sexual orientation change efforts," are practices that seek to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices are based on the false idea that being LGBTQ is a mental illness that needs to be cured—an idea which has been rejected by every major medical and mental health group. Importantly, conversion therapy does not include legitimate therapies that provide acceptance, support, or understanding of LGBTQ identities; that facilitate coping, social support, or identity exploration; or that address unlawful conduct or unsafe sexual practices. This legislation would prohibit state-licensed healthcare professional from engaging in conversion therapy with children below the age of 18.

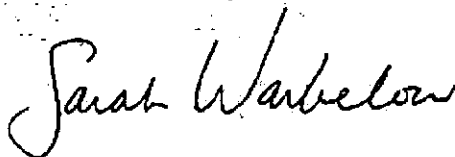
There is no credible evidence that conversion therapy can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, and it is abundantly clear that conversion therapy poses devastating health risks for LGBTQ youth including depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness, and even suicidal behavior. This is why the nation's leading mental health organizations have ubiquitously decried these unscientific practices.¹

Unfortunately, due to discrimination against LGBTQ people and the fact that professional rules have not kept up with this widespread understanding, some licensed mental health professionals continue to engage in conversion therapy. A recent Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law report revealed that an estimated 20,000 LGBTQ minors in states without protections will be subjected to conversion therapy by a licensed healthcare professional if state officials fail to act.² Additionally, a 2018 study from the Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University found that suicide attempts nearly tripled for LGBTQ youth who reported both home-based efforts and outside-the-home efforts to change their sexual orientation (compared to LGBTQ youth who did not experience such change efforts).³

Providers who engage in conversion therapy under state license can mislead families about the risks involved, leading to negative psychological outcomes, irreparable damage to family cohesiveness, and lasting personal and social harms. This legislation is needed to protect families from these damaging practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of this critical bill to protect LGBTQ youth.

Sincerely,



Sarah Warbelow
Legal Director
Human Rights Campaign

¹ For example, the American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Counseling Association, American Psychiatric Association, and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy all have position statements criticizing conversion therapy.

² Brown, Taylor N.T., Conron, Kerith J., and Mallory, Christy. *Conversion Therapy and LGBTQ Youth*, The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law (Jan. 2018).

³ Caitlin Ryan, Russell B. Toomey, Rafael M. Diaz & Stephen T. Russell, *Parent-Initiated Sexual Orientation Change Efforts With LGBT Adolescents: Implications for Young Adult Mental Health and Adjustment*, Journal of Homosexuality (Nov. 2018).