

Legislative Update: Conversion Therapy

Senate Bill 5722—Restricting the practice of conversion therapy—passed the Washington State Senate with bipartisan support on January 19, 2018 (32 yea, 16 nay, 1 excused). The bill has now been referred to the House and will be scheduled for a public hearing in the coming weeks. Corresponding House Bill 2753 has previously passed several times and it is anticipated that the House will once again pass this important legislation. WAMFT looks forward to the bill signing with Governor Jay Inslee, enacting the bill into law and rendering the practice of conversion therapy unlawful. To date, nine additional states have outlawed conversion therapy.

The Washington Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (WAMFT) has provided lawmakers with a statement of strong legislative support. WAMFT's position of support is in alignment with social policy as outlined by the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). To review AAMFT's statement pertaining to conversion therapy, and for review of research regarding this practice, refer to the social policies page on AAMFT's website.

http://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/about_aamft/position_on_couples.aspx

As a reminder, conversion therapy is an outcome-orientated regime that seeks to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, including efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions, or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same sex. Conversion therapy is not recognized as an evidence-based treatment model nor is it included in the training curriculum of COAMFTE accredited graduate programs.

WAMFT specifically supports prohibiting licensed mental health providers from performing conversion therapy on individuals under the age of 18. This act should be considered unprofessional conduct. Youth who undergo conversion therapy, either voluntary or involuntary, are at an increased risk of experiencing mental health difficulties including, but not limited to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, unsafe sex practices, and suicide. Refer to AAMFT's website for further research information.

Prohibiting conversion therapy does not equate with restricting a therapist's ability to assist individuals in exploring sexual or gender identity and accompanying cognitive and emotional processes. In ethical adherence, providers are encouraged to utilize evidence-based therapeutic approaches in this regard.

WAMFT's 1,313 membership is comprised of diverse perspectives among our shared profession. Should any members oppose this bill and/or the restriction of conversion therapy, they may express opposition as private citizens but cannot do so in affiliation with WAMFT or AAMFT. To oppose this bill in affiliation with either association is a violation of AAMFT's social policy.

WAMFT's lobbyist, Amber Lewis of Lewis Consulting, continues to monitor the status of this bill and our priorities and interests in Olympia. Please feel free to reach out to her with questions and/or comments. She can be reached at amber@lewisconsulting.co (not .COM).

Should members be interested in watching the Senate hearing referenced, a link has been provided.

www.tvw.org/watch/?clientID=9375922947&eventID=2018011151&eventID=2018011151&startStreamAt=3695&stopStreamAt=5186&autoStartStream=true

WAMFT Legislative Committee