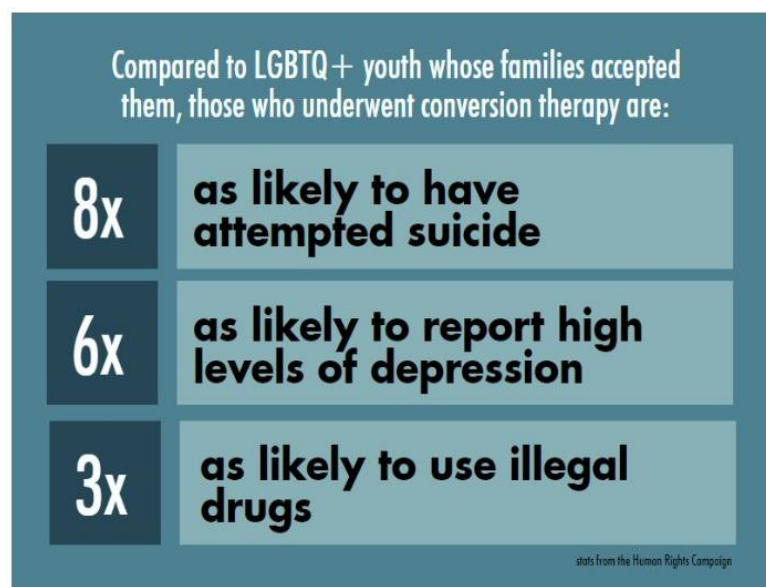


Chairman Weisz and members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Laura Frisch, and I have been a licensed, practicing social worker in the state of North Dakota for 26 years. I hold both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in social work, and today I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 1332. Our profession as social workers is part of the social sciences, meaning we look to validated studies to make decisions about the interventions we use and to guide us in our work.

Over 20 years ago, the National Association of Social Workers declared that conversion therapy is not effective, and in fact, can cause tremendous harm, especially to individuals under 18. We're in good company. In fact, the *American Academy of Pediatrics*, *American Counseling Association*, *American Federation of Teachers*, *American Psychological Association*, *American School Counselor Association*, *American School Health Association*, *Interfaith Alliance Foundation*, *National Association of School Psychologists*, and many, many more recognize that conversion therapy is not an acceptable intervention for individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ+). That is because they have all declared that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and therefore there is no need for a "cure." When the North Dakota Board of Social Work Examiners adopted changes in June 2021 to the administrative code governing social workers, they were simply following suit with nearly every other major health and mental health organization in the United States.



I am gravely concerned that passing HB1332 sends the message to parents and others who have not researched conversion therapy, its efficacy and its harmful impact that this is an appropriate intervention. Depression, anxiety, alcoholism, suicide, drug use and low self-esteem are just a few of the potential effects of conversion therapy.

That is not to imply that therapy or counseling programs have no role to play with individuals who are LGBTQ+, or those who feel confused or are questioning their sexual identity. The role, however, is a neutral one, not invested in a particular outcome for the client. In contrast, conversion therapy takes a one-sided stance, that homosexuality in any form is wrong, and that only heterosexuality is right.

I urge members of the committee to leave decisions about the ethical behavior of social workers in the hands of the profession, and to vote do not pass on HB1332. Thank you and I would welcome any questions.