



January 24, 2023

To the Members of the North Dakota House Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express our opposition to HB1332, which would override professional ethics standards for licensed social workers and protect the unethical practice of conversion therapy.

The following is a letter by the Former Ex-Gay Leaders Alliance, a group of 25 former providers of conversion therapy, expressing their strong opposition to this bill.

Conversion therapy, also known as “reparative therapy,” “ex-gay therapy” or “sexual orientation change efforts” (SOCE), professes to help lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to change or overcome their sexual orientation or gender identity.

At one time, we were not only deeply involved in conversion “therapy” programs; we were the founders, the leaders, and the promoters.

Together, we represent more than half a century of experience, so few people are more knowledgeable about the ineffectiveness and harm of conversion therapy. We know firsthand the terrible emotional and spiritual damage it can cause, especially for LGBTQ youth.

We once believed that there was something morally wrong and psychologically “broken” about being LGBTQ. We know better now.

We once believed that sexual orientation or gender identity were somehow chosen or could be changed. We know better now.

We once thought it was impossible to embrace our sexual orientation or sexual identity as an intrinsic, healthy part of who we are and who we were created to be. We know better now.

Looking back, we were just believing (and sometimes teaching) what we had been taught — that our sexual orientation or gender identity needed mending. We grew up being told that being LGBTQ was disordered, sick, mentally ill, sinful and displeasing to God. We grew up being told that loving, same-sex relationships were shallow, lust-driven, deceived, disordered and impossible.

We grew up with the repetitive message that LGBTQ people were not enough — not straight enough, not Christian enough, not manly or womanly



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enough, not faithful enough, not praying enough. Never, ever enough.

"Toxic" probably sums it up best. That message is poison to the soul. Especially a child's soul. It can take a lifetime to get rid of that old programming and replace it with healthy, non-toxic views of yourself.

Recovery from conversion therapy is difficult at best. Some remain forever scarred, emotionally and spiritually. Conversion therapy reinforces internalized homophobia, anxiety, guilt and depression. It leads to self-loathing and emotional and psychological harm when change doesn't happen. Regrettably, too many will choose suicide as a result of their sense of failure.

In light of this, we now stand united in our conviction that conversion therapy is not "therapy" but is instead both ineffective and harmful. We align ourselves with every major mainstream professional medical and mental health organization in denouncing attempts to change sexual orientation or gender identity.

As former "ex-gay" leaders, having witnessed the incredible harm done to those who attempted to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, we join together in calling for Minnesota to ban conversion therapy – and to oppose any measure to protect conversion therapy. We can't take back the harm that we caused, but we want to prevent future damage.

Enacting HB1332 would protect the harmful conduct that we, as former conversion therapy advocates, have renounced.

This letter was authored by Michael Bussee, a co-founder of Exodus International, and signed by members of the Former Ex-Gay Leaders Alliance (FELA): Alan Manning Chambers; Anthony Bishop; Bill Prickett; Bradford Allen Reubendale; Cat Chapman; Darlene Bogle; David Foreman; David Matheson; Don Brown; Jeff Coe; Jeremy Marks; Jim Marjoram; John J. Smid; John Paulk; Kim Brett; McKrae Game; Paul Martin; Randy Thomas; Roy A. Blankenship; Tim Rymel; Wendy VanderWal Gritter; Wenn Lawson; and Yvette Cantu Schneider.

We join the Former Ex-Gay Leaders Alliance in strongly opposing HB1332, and we urge you to vote against this legislation.



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Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of overlapping, fluid strokes that form a stylized, somewhat abstract representation of the name Mathew Shurka.

Mathew Shurka
Co-Founder, Born Perfect
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