

January 24, 2023

Dear Chair Weisz and Members of the House Human Services Committee:

My name is Rev. Karen Van Fossan. I am an ordained minister and licensed professional counselor, serving as a pastoral counselor in the state of North Dakota. **I ask that you give HB 1332 a Do Not Pass recommendation.**

This bill directly contradicts ethical conduct for counselors like myself. These ethical standards are set by qualified mental health professionals, based upon accumulated expertise, research, and practice. Conversion therapy does not become ethical simply by an act of legislation. In fact, according to a position statement by the American Counseling Association (ACA):

“Conversion or reparative therapy is the discredited practice of using ‘therapy’ to attempt to change someone's sexual orientation. The American Counseling Association opposes conversion therapy because it does not work, can cause harm, and violates our Code of Ethics. It is an attempt to treat something that is not a mental illness. Conversion therapy has been banned in California, Oregon, Illinois, Vermont, New Jersey, New Mexico, Connecticut, Nevada, Rhode Island, Washington, Maryland, New Hampshire, Hawaii, Delaware, New York, Massachusetts, Colorado, Maine, and Washington DC. ACA will continue to support state legislation that bans this discredited practice.”

In other words, **the expectations of this bill are in direct conflict with the expectations of my professional Code of Conduct.**

Indeed, **this bill would do unnecessary harm to the young LGBTQ+ people I serve.** The fundamental principle that I draw upon in my work is the assurance that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. This is no less true for LGBTQ+ children and young people than it is for anyone else.

Still, according to the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey in North Dakota, lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are:

- Twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to be bullied, either electronically or on school property;
- More than three times as likely to feel sad or hopeless;
- More than twice as likely to attempt suicide.

As the American Counseling Association makes clear, conversion therapy doesn't address these disparities; it exacerbates them. It's hard enough being different in a culture that values uniformity. There's no reason to make life any harder for the wide, diverse rainbow of God's creation. LGBTQ+ youth, like any youth in counseling settings, need support from **qualified, ethical mental health practitioners who affirm their inherent goodness.**

I urge you to vote Do Not Pass on HB 1332. Thank you very much for your time and attention, and I would be glad to respond to any questions.

Sincerely,
Rev. Karen Van Fossan, M.Div., LPC