

OPPOSING HOUSE BILL 1430:

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 43-41 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the regulation of social workers.

Sponsors: Introduced by Rep. VanWinkle, Rep. K. Anderson, Rep. Bolinske, Sen. Castaneda, Rep. Christianson, Rep. Frelich, Rep. Heilman, Rep. Hoverson, Rep. Kasper, Rep. Koppelman, Rep. Louser, Sen. Paulson

Please include this written testimony with the Human Services Committee Hearing testimony journal for public record.

My name is Kevin R. Tengesdal from Bismarck. I am a Navy veteran, a publicist and graphic designer, a Bible college BA graduate, and a UND MSW graduate. As a Christian who is gay and a proponent of the respect and dignity of humanity, I resolutely request a unanimous DO NOT PASS on House Bill 1430 relating to the regulation of social workers, as presented or amended.

It's crucial to note that no mental health therapist professionals, licensed social workers, or any expert from the North Dakota Social Work Licensure Board or the NASW North Dakota Chapter are among the sponsors of this bill. These professionals, who are well-versed in the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) stance on homosexuality and the dangers of 'conversion therapy' (CT), are the ones we should trust, not legislative overreach.

HB 1430 emphasizes "questioning the individual's sexuality or gender" and characterizes the therapy as consistent with "heterosexuality or the individual's biological sex." Since this remark focuses on those unsure of who they are or are discovering who they are, one interpretation suggests this being younger or more vulnerable groups. Even though the shift in language from "engage in" to "offer" and the narrower framing in HB 1430 could be an effort to soften the impression of coercion or active promotion and focus on individual choice, both bills propose to suggest "conversion therapy" is not an ethical violation in scope.

GLAAD – the world's largest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) media advocacy organization – defines "conversion therapy" as any attempt to change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression¹. A research study from Cornell

¹ *GLAAD Media Reference Guide – In Focus: 'conversion therapy'* (2024) GLAAD. Available at: <https://glaad.org/reference/conversion-therapy/> (Accessed: 18 January 2025).

University states that “conversion or reparative therapy” is an ineffective pseudo-therapy. Peer-reviewed studies indicate that there is no credible evidence that “conversion therapies” are effective in changing sexual orientation².

GLAAD indicates that as the practice of “conversion therapy” has come under peer-reviewed research-based scrutiny, “conversion therapy” providers (and conservative promoters) frequently change the terminology to further their agenda. Some may frame their abusive practices as “pastoral care” rather than psychology. Many participants in sexual orientation and gender identity conversion programs are young people who are coerced into them by their parents after being advised by religious authorities or others that they must transform their child in question.

The negative effects of 'Conversion therapies' on individuals' questioning the individual's sexuality or gender,' particularly youth, cannot be overstated. A study by San Francisco State University³ found that highly rejected LGBTQ young people were significantly more likely to experience mental health issues and engage in risky behaviors.

- 8x more likely to report having attempted suicide
- 6x more likely to report high levels of depression
- 3x more likely to use illegal drugs
- 3x more likely to be at high risk of HIV and STDs

I implore the Representatives who have introduced this bill, their constituents, and supporters of this bill to consider the impact of their actions. Do you want these alarming statistics to be representative of North Dakota’s LGBTQ youth? The decision to reject this bill could make a significant difference in their lives.

Routinely, we hear of the statistics of LGBTQ youth and risk behaviors. Many assume it is because of this “chosen lifestyle.” In reality, we must acknowledge that rejection, bigotry, and hostility against LGBTQ individuals are some of the reasons for various types of risk behaviors. Not for being who they are but for being told not to be who they are — the “you can be queer,

² *What does the scholarly research say about whether conversion therapy can alter sexual orientation without causing harm?* (2021) *What We Know*. Available at: <https://whatwewknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-whether-conversion-therapy-can-alter-sexual-orientation-without-causing-harm/> (Accessed: 18 January 2025).

³ Ryan, C. *et al.* (2009) ‘Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino Lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults’, *Pediatrics*, 123(1), pp. 346–352. doi:10.1542/peds.2007-3524.

but just do not do the queer” ideology. Imagine your family daily telling you that you can be Christian (a chosen lifestyle) while advising you not to do the Christian stuff in public.

I am a survivor of “conversion therapy.” Through the 1990s, I put myself through a decade of varying degrees of “conversion therapy” or “pray away the gay” efforts, all in a religious futile attempt to “fix myself.” I have a history of attempted suicide and clinically diagnosed chronic depression and PTSD, mostly in part because I tried praying away the gay, because of familial rejection, and because of religious fundamentalist trauma. Moreover, through it all, God’s grace and mercy have always been present, helping shield me from the bigotry of those who choose not to understand.

I implore that you and the 2025 North Dakota Legislative Assembly members stand on the right side of dignity and respect and vote against this destructive bill. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully,
Kevin R. Tengesdal
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District 35