

Testimony to the Senate Human Services Committee Hearing

From: Kayla Solem, LCSW, LAC

RE: House Bill 1430

March 10, 2025

Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee thank you for your time and commitment to North Dakotans. I believe we can all work together on creating better communities and outcomes for everyone in our state.

My name is Kayla Solem and I work as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Williston, North Dakota. I began in the social work field in 2016. I have a sincere interest in helping others which eventually led to me obtaining additional schooling and clinical licensure to help others through their struggles. I am submitting testimony in opposition to HB 1430.

The proposed legislation creates an opportunity for conversion therapy to be utilized in practice. Conversion therapy is a disheartening modality that has been harmful to the mental health and well-being of clients. The intention to change a client's sexual orientation or gender identity is conversion therapy. Evidence-based practice standards must be followed when providing therapy. A variety of professional organizations including the National Association of Social Workers and outside of the social work field such as the American Psychiatric Association, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and National Institute of Mental Health find the practice of conversion therapy to be harmful. This bill states in Section 2 that it is an ethical violation for licensed social workers to engage in "conversion therapy," but then allows it in Section 3, though described differently. There is no need for a bill for clinical social workers to provide care to those who are questioning their identity relating to sexual orientation or gender identity.

This bill provides an avenue for conversion therapy. For children, this is where HB 1430 can be even more dangerous. Caregivers could potentially seek out help for conversion therapy for their children. Research shows that 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. Yet those who felt high social support from their family reported attempting suicide at less than half the rate of those who felt low or moderate social support. These statistics reiterate that conversion therapy is dangerous and the need for clinicians to be diligent in helping versus harming.

There seems to be some confusion with what therapy is. Mental health therapy involves simple concepts-listening, reflecting, supporting, to name a few. A mental health therapist can have various educational backgrounds including social work or counseling. A therapist's role, in my case LCSW's role, in the therapeutic relationship

involves creating a safe place for an individual to explore their various feelings. Having a strong therapeutic relationship with the identified client is suicide prevention. I have worked with adult and teenage clients in various circumstances related to their gender identity or sexual orientation. Every individual has a unique set of beliefs and values involving religious, spiritual, cultural, familial, etc. My job is to support an individual in their adversities by helping them gain confidence, connections, and ways to cope with stress with however someone chooses to live out their beliefs and values. My job is not to influence how individuals choose to practice their beliefs and values unless intervention is needed to prevent harm.

Licensed Clinical Social Workers must obtain an undergraduate and graduate degree, complete 3,000 supervised clinical hours, and pass their licensing exam to become licensed to practice therapy. I am hopeful you will trust the profession and judgment of licensed professionals to practice in ways that are ethical and help others. We have laws that protect kids from harm. We should not be creating laws that put them at risk for harm. Conversion therapy causes harm according to research and major medical, psychiatric, and psychological associations. I am respectfully requesting that the Senate Human Services Committee vote Do Not Pass on this bill in its current form.

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