



Andy J. Johnson, Ph.D.  
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RE: Testimony regarding conversion therapy

Introduction: Name and qualifications

Andy J. Johnson, Ph.D.

Education: AB in Psychology from Drury University (Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ)  
MA, Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Notre Dame (Roman Catholic)  
APA Approved Internship: Pine Rest Christian Hospital (Christian Reformed)

Current Position: Associate Professor of Psychology at Bethel University (Pietist, Evangelical)

Past Member-at-Large, Division 36: Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality of the American Psychological Association (APA)

Past Co-Chair, APA Division 36 Task Force on Religion and Poverty

Board Member, Co-Chair of the Action Team on Mentoring and Training of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence (NPEIV)

(In short, I am familiar with the relationships between religion and psychology.)

Dear St. Paul City Council,

Legislation is needed to ban the practice of conversion therapy. This is not a matter of religion. This is a matter of putting an end to mental health malpractice.

I strongly support the ordinance before you to ban conversion therapy. Conversion therapy, also referred to as “reparative therapy” or “sexual orientation change efforts” (SOCE) refers to the efforts of mental health providers to try to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of an LGBT person. The bill before you protects the mental health of LGBT adolescents and adults from conversion therapy which research has demonstrated to be harmful and ineffective.

There is no scientifically rigorous evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of conversion therapy.

Scientific studies have found negative effects associated with conversion therapy, however, including increased levels of depression, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and substance abuse in adults. Recent research has found adolescents surviving conversion therapy to have less educational attainment in addition to the increased depression and suicide risk adult survivors of conversion therapy experience.

Conversion therapy is considered unethical and harmful mental health practice. Major health organizations with policy statements against the use of conversion therapy include but are not limited to the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers. Conversion therapy use among minors has also been condemned by a report submitted to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

In conclusion, my position is undergirded by scientific evidence and the medical principle of above all, or first, do no harm. Responsible, culturally competent practitioners should not engage in conversion therapy. I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of a conversion therapy ban. Approving this ordinance allows St. Paul to protect vulnerable populations from mental health malpractice.

Best regards,

*Andy J. Johnson, Ph.D.*  
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