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To: Members of the Judiciary Committee
Cc: Senator Megan Hunt
Senator Patty Pansing Brooks
Re: LB 167, Prohibit Conversion Therapy to individuals under the age of majority
Date: February 6, 2019

Chairperson Lathrop and members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Nebraska Psychological Association supports this legislation (LB 167) to prohibit the use in minors of therapy intended to alter sexual orientation.

The American Psychological Association, in agreement with the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, American College of Physicians, American Counseling Association, American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychoanalytic Association, American School Counselor Association, American School Health Association, National Association of Social Workers, World Psychiatric Association, and the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, opposes the practice of therapies intended to change sexual orientation from gay, lesbian, or bisexual to heterosexual because such therapies are not needed, there is no credible evidence that they work, and there is a significant potential that they could cause harm to participants.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association, due to mounting research evidence that having a same-gender sexual orientation is not inherently pathological, decreed that “homosexuality” is not a mental illness. While gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are more likely than heterosexuals to suffer from depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide, a significant body of research indicates that these mental health issues are directly caused by the discrimination that LGB individuals face in society, not their sexual orientations. To further support this point, a growing body of research indicates that when communities are accepting and supportive of LGB individuals, they are not more likely to experience mental health issues than their heterosexual neighbors.

In 2009, the American Psychological Association, after conducting a comprehensive literature review, concluded that there is little evidence that therapies attempting to change sexual

orientation can be successful. This is not surprising, given that decades of research have suggested that sexual orientation, like handedness, is not a characteristic that can be altered therapeutically. A former student of mine, who had been forced into this type of therapy by his parents, remarked that it is very frustrating to attempt to do something that cannot be done.

Our final concern is that therapies designed to change sexual orientation are likely to cause harm to participants. Being required to change one's sexual orientation communicates that this aspect of the self is undesirable, which logically could lead to self-hatred, depression, and suicide. In addition, such therapies often include inaccurate and very pejorative information about sexual orientation. My former student asserted by being forced into this type of treatment, he felt rejected and negatively judged by his parents and his community, feelings that only deepened when he failed at the treatment.

The committee may want to consider removing from the procedures banned by this bill efforts to change gender identity in pre-adolescent children. Although research supports the efficacy of affirming the gender identity of transgender and gender nonconforming adolescents, at present there is not a clear scientific consensus regarding the treatment of gender dysphoria in preadolescent children.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Respectfully,

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President of the Nebraska Psychological Association