

**Colorado Legislature, House Public Health Care & Human Services
Committee**

**Testimony *Against* House Bill 15-1175 “Concerning a Prohibition on
Conversion Therapy by a Licensed Mental Health Provider”**

**Jeff Johnston,
Issues Analyst – Marriage, Gender and Homosexuality
Public Policy Department
Focus on the Family
24 February 2015**

Good afternoon Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee.

I strongly oppose the passage of HB 15-1175, the act that would limit the freedom of minors to seek licensed professional counseling for unwanted same-sex attractions. I represent myself; my family; hundreds of men and women I know who have left homosexuality; and tens of thousands of Colorado men, women and children who are constituents of Focus on the Family.

My first reason for opposing this bill is deeply personal. As an adolescent and teen, I had strong homosexual feelings. I did not choose these, nor do most people. I did not want to have these attractions, and I also wrestled with my sense of identity: Did having these feelings mean I was gay? The internal battle was intense and painful.

I did not want to act on these feelings or identify as gay for a number of reasons, including the following:

- My faith taught, and I believed, that God designed sexual intimacy to unite a husband and wife in marriage.
- I was familiar with the many health risks – psychological, relational and physical – associated with homosexuality. There is ample research demonstrating these increased health risks.
- And, I really wanted to have a family of my own, a wife and children.

It wasn't until I was in my mid-twenties, almost 30 years ago, that I found there was change and transformation for people like me – with unwanted homosexual feelings. A large part of growth and change for me came from my work with a licensed therapist. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about counseling for unwanted homosexual feelings. Please don't believe the propaganda and spin that surrounds this issue.

In fact, “conversion therapy” or “change therapy” is really a misnomer, as such work does not entail trying to change from homosexual to heterosexual. Trying really hard to eliminate feelings does not work and was not the focus of my own therapy. Nor does it involve aversion techniques, coercion or promises of 100% change from gay to straight. All that would be counter-therapeutic. In all my years of work with this issue, I have never seen these.

Instead, most of this type of work involves informed client consent. It involves focusing on what any therapist would focus on: family and relational dynamics; replacing false beliefs with truth; learning how to build and sustain healthy friendships; developing a healthy, solid sense of self; and grieving and healing for past wounds or abuse. Most such therapy involves helping people live in line with their faith. It helps them pursue a healthy identity and sexual integrity. I wish that I had found such help earlier, in my teens.

Therapy is not easy or painless work. But for many, a decrease in homosexual attractions and an increase in opposite-sex attractions happens along the way. That is what happened to me. I met, fell in love with and married a beautiful woman. Today we have three sons – a 17 year-old high school senior and twin 14-year old eighth graders. My marriage, family and children would not exist without the help of several licensed counselors who walked with me along a wonderful, painful, insightful journey of healing, growth and change.

I oppose this measure not just because of my own story, although that certainly plays a part. But here are four other important reasons for shutting down this bill:

1. There is no scientific proof (outcome based studies with control groups) that minors – or anyone, for that matter – are harmed by working with a counselor to diminish unwanted same-sex attractions.

2. Research suggests that sexual orientation, especially in adolescence, is fluid and subject to change. This bill only allows for “gay- and “transgender-affirming therapy.” Aside from the fact that such therapy is ideologically driven, there is no scientific research demonstrating that such therapy is effective and without harm.
3. The mental health professions hold in the highest regard client autonomy, client self-determination and client spirituality. This bill represses all three.
4. This bill infringes on the freedom of speech and freedom of religion of minors. In America, individuals are blessed with the right to steward their sexuality according to their faith.

For these, and many other reasons, I advocate against this bill. Thank you.