

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

**Testimony *Against* House Bill 16-1210 “Concerning a Prohibition on
Conversion Therapy by a Licensed Mental Health Provider”**

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Good afternoon Madame Chair and Members of the Committee.

My name is Jeff Johnston. I’m here representing myself, my family and hundreds of men and women I know who have left homosexuality. I work as a Marriage, Gender and Homosexuality Public Policy Analyst at Focus on the Family, so I also represent tens of thousands of Colorado constituents.

My opposition to this bill is deeply personal.

Some of my earliest childhood memories are of engaging in sexual play with other neighbor boys. There was the blonde boy from kindergarten. The neighbor who I often spent the night with when I was about six – he led the way in sexual exploration. The boy down the street, when I was about seven; we would go into a closet together and simulate sexual activity.

I felt a great deal of shame, guilt and fear about these activities, and kept silent about them for many years. I withdrew from healthy, non-sexual relationships with other boys and men. I questioned my identity and sexuality, especially during adolescence. What did this mean about me? Did this mean I was homosexual? Was I gay?

These are not uncommon responses. Children are not emotionally, physically, psychologically or spiritually equipped to handle adult sexuality. Researchers from the U. S. Centers for Disease Control, in a review of many studies of childhood

sexual abuse, tell us that such incidents can lead to self-questioning, struggles with masculinity, increased depression, gender confusion, and more risky sexual behavior. They also tell us that men who have sex with men – their terminology – are at least three times more likely to report Childhood Sexual Abuse than heterosexual men.

Like many others who are exposed to sex or pornography at an early age, I questioned my sexuality. I want to be clear: Childhood sexual abuse does not *cause* homosexuality – there is no “one thing” that causes homosexuality. But it certainly is a contributing factor for many people, as it derails heterosexual development.

In my twenties I went to see a counselor for unwanted same-sex attractions and sexual activity. Because of my faith, I believed that God had designed sexual intimacy to unite a husband and wife in marriage. I was also familiar with the greater health risks associated with homosexual behavior. And, I wanted a family of my own, a wife and children.

Thankfully, a licensed professional counselor was available to help me. We did not focus, in counseling, on my “sexual orientation” or “changing from gay to straight.” We talked about and worked through issues that many counselors deal with, including: family and relational dynamics; significant childhood events; understanding and managing emotions; my self-image, replacing lies with truth; building healthy relationships; forgiving others; and receiving forgiveness.

Most such therapy involves helping people live according to their faith. It helps them pursue a healthy identity and sexual integrity. I wish that I had found such care earlier, in my teens, and I’m grateful for several mental health professionals who have provided hope and healing over the years.

Now if I might shift from my own story to making a few general statements about therapy for those who want help aligning their sexuality – attractions, behavior and identity – with their faith:

1. Focus on the Family does not engage in – and has never engaged in – “conversion therapy” or “sexual orientation change efforts.” We do have licensed and pastoral counselors on staff who may field phone calls from individuals

seeking help in the area of sexual confusion. After assessing their needs, our counselors help direct them to appropriate resources.

2. Licensed mental health care providers do not engage in coercion or aversive therapy for homosexuality. Licensing groups in this state have ethics, conduct and practice guidelines which cover these issues.

3. There are no scientific, prospective studies that demonstrate that “conversion therapy” or “change efforts” are harmful. And, there are no studies of reparative therapy and teens. The proponents of this bill may point to a study of negative outcomes associated with teens rejected by their families. That is not a study of so-called “conversion therapy.”

4. The American Psychological Association reviewed studies on homosexuality and change in 2009. Despite the fact that the entire task force was either gay-identified or gay activists, they did not recommend a ban of such therapies. They concluded there was not enough research to demonstrate if therapies for unwanted homosexuality were effective and helpful or not. They called for more research, not for making therapy illegal.

5. Banning therapy for teens with unwanted homosexuality threatens freedom of religion and free speech. It infringes on client spirituality, autonomy and self-determination – values upheld by every professional mental health group.

I urge you to vote against this egregious legislation that denies help for boys and teens who, for whatever reason, question their sexuality. They deserve the help, comfort and support which this bill would deny them.