



KENTUCKY MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

August 18, 2020

Co-Chair Sen. John Schickel, Co-Chair Rep. Adam Koenig and Members,
Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations
Capitol Annex Room 171
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Sen. Schickel, Rep. Koenig and Members,

RE: Youth Mental Health Protection Act

The Kentucky Mental Health Coalition was founded in 1982 and is comprised of over 80 organizations representing mental health professional organizations, agencies and facilities, consumers, family members and advocates. As members of the mental health community across Kentucky, we strongly support passage of the Youth Mental Health Protection Act in the 2021 Kentucky General Assembly session and we hope that you, too, will support this important and life-saving legislation.

We are acutely aware of the destructive and sometimes life-ending impact that this so-called “therapy” can have on youth as it aims to “convert” young Kentuckians from their sexual orientation and gender identity. Under the guise of providing “therapy” – which has been discredited by nearly every major mental health and medical professional association across the country and internationally – unethical licensed mental health professionals wreak havoc on the lives of their victims and their families. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not mental illnesses, nor are they developmental disorders in need of “treatment”.

The disastrous outcomes of “conversion therapy” have been well-documented: depression, guilt, hopelessness, shame, social withdrawal, suicidal thoughts and feelings, substance abuse, self-blame, decreased self-esteem, increased self-hatred, hostility and blame toward parents, feelings of anger and betrayal, loss of friends and close relationships, problems in sexual and emotional intimacy, high-risk behaviors, loss of faith, and a feeling of being dehumanized and untrue to self. And these unfortunate effects often occur during adolescence, when our youth are the most in need of affirmation and grounding, and least able to withstand the kinds of attacking, shaming and aversion techniques that are used in “conversion therapy”

The saddest and most alarming outcome for a high percentage of youth subjected to these attempts to change gender identity and sexual orientation is the despair that leads to suicide attempts. Of the LGB youths that indicated they had undergone conversion therapy, 42% reported having made a suicide attempt in the previous year (*Trevor Project National Survey, 2019*). This was more than twice the rate of their LGB peers who did not undergo “conversion therapy”.

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We owe our Kentucky youth protection from this harmful practice in the same way that we have worked together to protect them from underage drinking and tobacco use, harmful substances and vaping. The Youth Mental Health Protection Act is a measure that will shield them from harm in the guise of therapy and save lives that would be lost to suicide. We urge you to support this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration and help with this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila A. Schuster". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

Sheila A. Schuster, Ph.D.
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