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To: Members of the Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations Interim Joint Committee
From: Dr. Terry I. Brooks
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Subj: The Youth Mental Health Protection Act

There is no question that Kentucky's kids are so fortunate to have a General Assembly that has a bipartisan blend of head and heart when it comes to the well-being of our youngest citizens. Whether on school safety or child welfare, you have found common ground and common-sense solutions for the common good of all of the Commonwealth's children.

And that is what I am counting on when it comes to the Youth Mental Health Protection Act, introduced by Senator Alice Foryg Kerr and Representative Lisa Willner.

We understand that the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity carry strong political views, and I recognize that there are sincere and well-intentioned divergent views around this policy arena. However, there should be an unanimity of voice (and votes) when it comes to the banning of conversion therapy. At its core, the Youth Mental Health Protection Act is a matter of the safety and well-being of vulnerable young people. It is neither a philosophical nor a political measure but an important lever to protect all of Kentucky's youth.

As states begin to understand the harm brought on by conversion therapy, with Virginia being the latest state to ban the use of conversion therapy, Kentucky has an opportunity to join our neighbors in the efforts to reduce negative health impacts to young people. Conversion therapy is linked to serious harm, including depression, suicide attempts, and substance abuse for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth who were forced to undergo it as minors. State-licensed practitioners offering conversion therapy often prey on well-intentioned parents and guardians who do not understand that they are putting their children at risk of long-lasting negative effects.

KYA supports the notion that children and parents should have access to high-quality, evidence-informed services. We also believe that licensed providers should be held to standards that ensure children are not harmed as a result of any intervention. The Youth Mental Health Protection Act creates the opportunity to ensure vulnerable young people are not subjected to harmful tactics and trauma-ensuing results when seeking services from licensed professionals.

As always, I invite your questions and input. You can reach me at tbrooks@kyyouth.org or on my cell as 502-235-2396. Thanks, in advance, for once again taking courageous, well-informed, bipartisan and kid-centric action when it comes to this measure.

Dr. Terry I. Brooks
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Kentucky's independent voice for kids