



**Testimony for the House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 1, 2017**

**HB 902 - Health Occupations - Conversion Therapy for Minors - Prohibition
(Youth Mental Health Protection Act)**

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SUPPORT

The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland (ACLU) supports HB 902, The Youth Mental Health Protection Act, which would protect LGBT youth from so-called “conversion therapy,” a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

As an organization committed to equality, liberty, and freedom for all people, the ACLU strongly supports government policies that prevent discrimination and protect LGBT rights. The government should not be in the business of providing licenses to discriminate against entire groups of people because of who they are or who they love. This type of discrimination has no place in our state, and it should be abolished.

Research has shown that conversion therapy poses dangerous health risks for LGBTQ youth. Use of these harmful practices can lead to depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness, and even suicidal behavior. National and statewide leaders in medicine, mental healthcare, and human services have rejected this practice.¹

By preventing state-licensed mental health care providers from engaging in conversion therapy with youth below the age of 18, The Youth Mental Health Protection Act would send a clear message that Maryland does not condone conversion therapy. The bill also expressly provides that the provision of conversion therapy to minors by state-licensed mental health care providers is unprofessional conduct subject to discipline by the relevant licensing authority. Additionally, this bill also protects parents from being taken advantage of by conversion therapy practitioners by making it clear that these practices are ineffective and harmful to their children.

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¹ See American Psychological Association, *Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation & Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel*, available at <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/facts.pdf> (“The most important fact about ‘reparative therapy,’ also sometimes known as ‘conversion’ therapy, is that it is based on an understanding of homosexuality that has been rejected by all the major health and mental health professions. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Association of Social Workers, together representing more than 477,000 health and mental health professionals, have all taken the position that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus there is no need for a ‘cure.’”).

California, Connecticut, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and the District of Columbia have enacted laws or regulations to protect minors from being subjected to conversion therapy by state-licensed mental health providers. Additionally, a growing number of municipalities have enacted similar protections, including cities and counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, Florida, and Arizona. Maryland must be next in protecting LGBTQ youth from the abusive and fraudulent practice of conversion therapy.

For these reasons, we urge you to issue a favorable recommendation for HB 902.

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