



new mexico Child Advocacy Networks

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



New Mexico Pediatric Society

April 6, 2017

Governor Susana Martinez
Office of the Governor
490 Old Santa Fe Trail
Room 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Governor Martinez:

The undersigned nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations are dedicated to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and families. This includes providing leadership and education that improves laws, policies and practices through sound research, analysis and advocacy. Protecting minors in New Mexico from dangerous and discredited so-called “conversion therapy” directly aligns with our priorities.

We implore you to sign into law Senate Bill (SB) 121. This legislation is consistent with the best interests of children in New Mexico. It prohibits state-licensed mental health providers from engaging in so-called “conversion therapy” with minors. Sometimes known as “reparative therapy,” conversion therapy is a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices are based on the false idea that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) is a mental illness that needs to be cured, an idea which has been rejected by every major mental health group for decades.

SB 121 is consistent with the robust base of professional knowledge that conversion therapy is extremely harmful to LGBTQ youth. There is no credible evidence that conversion therapy can change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity, and it is abundantly clear that conversion therapy poses devastating health risks for LGBTQ young people. These dangerous practices can lead to depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness, and even suicidal behavior, and for this reason the nation’s leading mental health organizations have roundly decried them.¹ Unfortunately, due to discrimination against LGBTQ people and the fact that professional rules have not kept up with this widespread understanding, some licensed mental health professionals continue to engage in conversion therapy.

Research shows that young people experience conversion therapy as a form of family rejection, and LGBTQ youth who experience family rejection face increased health risks. In one study, such youth were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, and 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs compared with peers who had not experienced such rejection.² On the other hand, family acceptance has been shown to be an important protective factor that can help to prevent suicide behavior and mental health issues. Providers who engage in

¹ For example, the American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Counseling Association, American Psychiatric Association, and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy all have position statements criticizing conversion therapy.

² Caitlin Ryan, et al., *Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults*. PEDIATRICS 346 (2009).

conversion therapy under state license can mislead families about the risks involved, leading to negative psychological outcomes and irreparable damage to family cohesiveness. This legislation is needed to protect families from these damaging practices.

It is clear that allowing state-licensed mental health providers to engage in conversion therapy with minors is not in the best interest of New Mexico's children and families. We urge you to protect the state's youth from abusive and debunked practices by signing SB 121 into law.

Sincerely,

New Mexico Child Advocacy Networks

New Mexico Child Psychiatrists (NM Chapter of American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry)

New Mexico Voices for Children

New Mexico Pediatric Society