I am writing in support of HB6695 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF YOUTH FROM CONVERSION THERAPY.

My name is Stephanie Leite, and I am a clinical and forensic psychologist practicing and living in the state of Connecticut. This bill is important because conversion therapy, also called reparative therapy, has been shown to be damaging to children. As someone who specializes in issues related to abuse and neglect, I see the practice of conversion therapy is emotionally abusive, just as it is abusive to tell a child they are worthless or wrong for any other reason.

Conversion therapy is therapy designed to convert people identifying as homosexual to become heterosexual. It is important to differentiate conversion therapy from therapy designed to assist individuals who are confused about their sexual identity. This can be helpful, just as therapy is helpful in making many sorts of life decisions, and is supported by professionals (APA, 2013).

In contrast, conversion therapy pathologizes homosexuality. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of Social Workers have taken the position that homosexuality is not a mental illness and, therefore, is not something that needs a “cure” (Just the Facts, 2008, Dimidjan & Hollon, 2010). In addition, conversion therapy is often chosen for minors, who have no control over their treatment.

Additionally, conversion therapy starts with the notion that the child’s sexual orientation represents a moral failure. It is often religiously based, which raises a special danger if conversion therapy is brought into schools, as there is a separation of church and state in the United States.
Importantly, the best forms of therapy can be shown to work with outcome based assessments. Conversion therapy has no such data behind it. Instead, conversion therapy uses behavioral modification techniques (such as the aversion therapy seen in a Clockwork Orange\(^1\)), to instill negative imagery, which may compromise the individual’s ability to have healthy relationships (Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002). The damage to children goes beyond self-esteem, as conversion therapy has been reported in the news as being associated with suicides (Thomas, 2015).

If Connecticut were to protect our children with the passing of this act, it would join with others, including California, Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont and the District of Columbia. I hope we can do so.

Stephanie Stein Leite, Psy.D.

If you are interested in reading more I suggest the below references:


\(^1\) This includes, by some reports, electroshock treatment as well as the administration of nausea creating drugs.