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Senator Melissa Wiklund
St. Paul, MN 55155

February 7th, 2023

Chair Wiklund:

Gender Justice envisions a world where everyone can thrive regardless of their gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation. Step by step, we're creating that world by dismantling legal, structural, and cultural barriers that contribute to gender inequity. We work to ensure that people of all genders have a meaningful right to bodily autonomy, safety, health, and opportunity.

We are writing in support of SF 23, a ban on mental health care professionals practicing conversion therapy on minors and vulnerable adults.

We know that LGBTQ+ teens in Minnesota already face poorer mental health outcomes than their cisgender and straight peers. The 2022 Minnesota Student Survey showed that of 11th graders who self-identified as gay or lesbian, 45% of males and 79% of females reported having long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional problems compared to 16% and 32% respectively for their straight counterparts.¹ These disparities carry over when asked about self injury, thoughts of suicide, and attempted suicide.

Further, we know that having access to affirming adults improves mental health outcomes and well being for LGBTQ youth. According to a 2022 survey of 34,000 LGBTQ youth, those "who live in a community that is accepting of LGBTQ people reported significantly lower rates of attempting suicide compared to those who do not."²

The picture becomes clear that we must do everything in our power to protect and affirm young LGBTQ Minnesotans. One clear first step is to pass SF 23. For decades, conversion therapy has been shown to be ineffective and dangerous - a position agreed upon by all major medical associations.

"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 together... have all taken the position that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus is not something that needs to or can be 'cured'".³

¹ <https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/mchs/surveys/mss/statewidetables.html>

² https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf

³ <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/just-the-facts>

Mental health care professionals should not be allowed to sell the idea that conversion therapy or similar practices are accepted within their field or that such so-called therapy has any positive impacts on minors. Minors who are in unaccepting homes already face enough hardship.

Conversion therapy is a dangerous practice. In the same national 2022 survey, 28% of LGBTQ youth who were forced into conversion therapy attempted suicide compared to 11% of their peers who were not threatened with or forced into conversion therapy.⁴ In fact, the practice is so dangerous that even the threat of conversion therapy is dangerous with 27% of LGBTQ youth who were threatened with conversion therapy reporting attempted suicide.⁵

With attacks on LGBTQ youth sweeping the nation, now is the time for Minnesota to step up and protect young people and vulnerable adults from conversion therapy.

Gender Justice has the honor of working with, representing, and providing resources for transgender and LGB youth in Minnesota. Everyday we get to see the joy and successes of students who are affirmed by their parents and communities. We envision a future where this can be a reality for all kids in Minnesota. We urge you to pass SF 23.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Megan Peterson".

Megan Peterson
Executive Director, Gender Justice

⁴ https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf

⁵ Ibid.