



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

New York State Senators Brad Hoylman & Michael Gianaris and New York State Assembly Member Deborah Glick, Hold Public Forum on Legislation Barring Sexual Orientation Change “Therapy” for Minors

BRAD HOYLMAN-SIGAL May 16, 2014

| ISSUE: **MENTAL HEALTH**

New York, NY – New York State Senators Brad Hoylman & Michael Gianaris, and New York State Assembly Member Deborah Glick today held a legislative forum in New York City to address the merits of their legislation ([S.4917-B/A.6983-B](#)) to prohibit sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) by licensed mental health professionals in New York State.

SOCE, or so-called “conversion therapy” or “reparative therapy,” has long been discredited by leading associations of health and mental health practitioners, and has been shown to have harmful long-term effects on the well-being and mental health of LGBT youth.

The panel drew nearly two dozen witnesses who testified about the need for this legislation, including individuals who had been subjected to the practice, mental health professionals, legal experts, clergy, and LGBT advocates.

One survivor, Mathew Shurka, joined by his mother and sister, shared his personal story of anguish, anxiety, depression, weight gain and other disabling effects that resulted from his

five years of “conversion therapy” with four different therapists, including one in Union Square. Mental health professionals from esteemed organizations, including the New York State Psychological Association, the New York State Psychiatric Association, American Counseling Association-NY, and the New York Association of School Psychologists, attested to the negative emotional and psychological outcomes that result from conversion efforts, and the lack of empirical evidence of the practice’s effectiveness. Legal experts and advocates argued that New York State should not be sanctioning mental health professionals who engage in this disreputable practice on young people who do not have the free will to refuse it, and pointed to the successes that similar legislation has had withstanding legal challenges in California and New Jersey.

S.4917-B/A.6983-B, sponsored by Senator Hoylman and Assembly Member Glick, amends the education law by prohibiting sexual orientation change efforts by licensed mental health providers for children under the age of 18.

State Senator Brad Hoylman said: “So-called ‘conversion therapy’ is among the worst frauds in history. The State of New York has a responsibility to stop licensed mental health professionals from causing irreparable damage to LGBT youth and their families. 21% of all LGBT youth have attempted suicide in the last year and are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers, and leading mental health organizations all agree that this practice increases feelings of depression and isolation in youth. At a time when the laws of this country are beginning to embrace the LGBT community, we must also do everything we can to nurture and protect our children as they discover their identities.”

State Senator Michael Gianaris said: “The experiences shared at our forum were heartbreaking and prove beyond any doubt the urgent need to ban gay conversion therapy for minors. New York has long been a leader on LGBT issues, and we need to live up to our

history when it comes to protecting children from this abominable practice, which is based not on science but intolerance. I will continue working with Senator Hoylman, Assemblywoman Glick, and the Empire State Pride Agenda to pass our bill as quickly as possible.”

Assembly Member Deborah J. Glick said: “Conversion therapy is a deeply destructive process that undermines an individual’s self-esteem. We must ban this mis-named therapy and protect young people from the enduring, negative effects of it.”

New York City Council Member Daniel Dromm said: “Young people, whether lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual, deserve to grow up without traumatizing clinical interventions aimed at changing who they are. I applaud Senators Hoylman and Gianaris and Assemblymember Glick for taking a significant step to ending this form of child abuse. I look forward to this bill passing and leading to even stronger measures such as including the largest perpetrators of conversion therapy: unlicensed counselors, therapists, and others. Given that unlicensed counselors and therapists form the vast majority of individuals employing conversion therapy, I urge the State Legislature to include these individuals in the legislation. It is time for New York to put the nail in the coffin of this odious practice and pass S.4917-B/A.6983-B as soon as possible.”

New Jersey Assemblyman Tim Eustace said: “I thank the Senators and Assemblymembers of New York for bringing awareness to the harmful practices of SOCE. As a region we need to work side by side to protect our children during critical stages of development. Together we can achieve more and I look forward to the day that New York joins New Jersey in banning conversion therapy for minors.”

Mathew Shurka, survivor who underwent conversion efforts in Union Square, said: “Senator

Hoylman and Assembly Member Glick's bill to ban conversion efforts has seen a tremendous amount of support from legislators and national health organizations. There is no reason why we can't ban 'conversion therapy' right here in New York State and keep LGBT youth out of harm's way. We cannot allow politics as usual during an election year to keep this bill from passing. It will be a shame if New York State does not act now to keep LGBT youth from experiencing the damage this practice caused me and my family."

Nathan M. Schaefer, Executive Director, Empire State Pride Agenda, said: "Mental health professionals who attempt to change a young person's true identity and make youth ashamed of his or her gender identity or sexual orientation are not only engaging in a practice long condemned by all major medical associations, but are causing serious psychological harm that leads to depression and even suicide among their young patients. The legislation currently before the State Legislature would protect LGBT minors from such conversion efforts and bring New York out of this 1950s-era quackery and up to speed with major medical and public opinion about the authenticity of LGBT identities and our right to be who we are."

Jason Cianciotto, Director of Public Policy, GMHC, said: "Protecting LGBT youth from scientifically discredited and unnecessary "ex-gay" therapy is important to preventing a host of negative medical and mental health outcomes, including HIV infection. Among gay and bisexual men in New York City, youth ages 13 to 29 are the only demographic that experienced an increase in HIV incidence in the past decade. The stigma and family rejection supported by the 'ex-gay' industry fuels the drivers of the epidemic and must be stopped."

Hayley Gorenberg, Deputy Legal Director, Lambda Legal, said: "I can't believe anyone's still debating it—but apparently we are. Conversion therapy. Reparative therapy. Sexual orientation change efforts. No name anyone calls it renders it acceptable, reputable or safe."

The leading medical, therapeutic and counseling organizations have lined up, one after another, to make crystal clear their opposition to attempts to change patients' identities in this way.”

Thomas Krever, Chief Executive Officer, Hetrick-Martin Institute, said: “On behalf of the young people of Hetrick-Martin Institute, I am deeply grateful for Senator Brad Hoylman for convening this legislative forum on conversion therapy. Conversion therapy is based on myth and not scientific fact and reflects a discredited and faulty practice. Rather than changing a young person and forcing them to conform, HMI celebrates a young person’s individuality and their right to be who they are.”

David Dinielli, Southern Poverty Law Center, said: “Conversion therapy is the modern-day snake oil. The state has the right and the obligation to protect LGBT youth from this dangerous 'remedy' for a condition that doesn't need fixing in the first place.”

Andrew Livanis, , New York Association of School Psychologists, said: “The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) strongly agrees that efforts to change a person’s gender and sexual identity are ineffective, harmful, and discriminatory. Such practices have no place in the state of New York.”

Ariel Shidlo, PhD, Research Institute Without Walls, said: “In considering the negative effects of sexual orientation change interventions (SOCIs) on minors we need to consider not only their individual effects, but also recognize the negative effects on the family. Nothing good can come out of a psychological intervention that teaches clients to blame their parents for causing a sexual orientation that SOCI clinicians tell clients to associate with undesirable psychological traits. In these hearings, then, we must also consider the thousands of parents who have experienced unnecessary shaming, directly and indirectly, at the hands of SOCI

clinicians. When SOCI fails all that are left are mutual recriminations, alienation, hurt feelings, sadness, and anger.”

Dr. Tamara Sullivan, American Counseling Association-NY, said: “The effectiveness and safety of conversion therapy has never been established. Mental health practitioners are committed to the health and wellness of clients, attempts to prevent homosexuality through conversion therapy are clearly contraindicated. Especially with youth, treating homosexuality as a disorder in a therapeutic relationship can cause harm by provoking guilt and shame and undermining self-esteem and healthy development.”