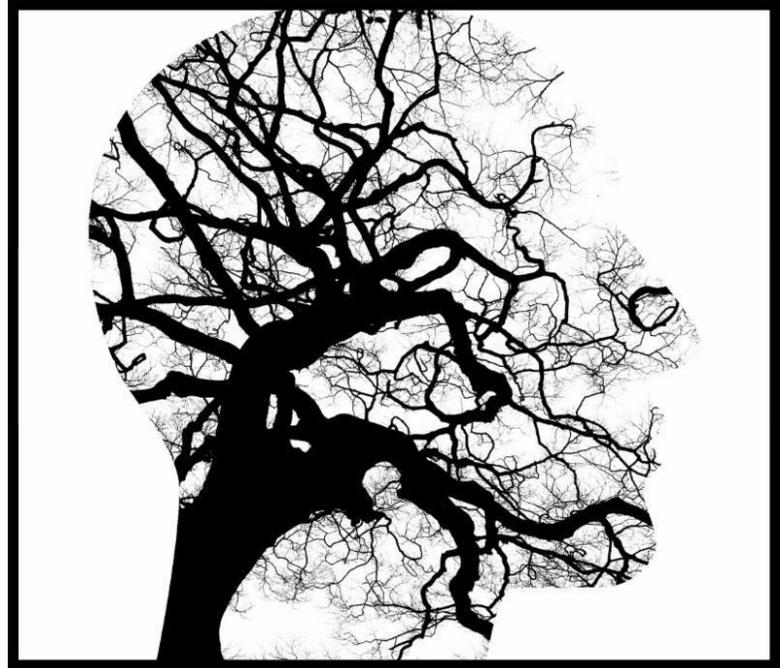


NEWS:

Controversial Bill Heading to Governor Seeks to Ban Conversion Therapy

JUNE 8, 2018 -- On a contested vote, the House of Representatives on Thursday sent to Gov. John Carney a bill that will prohibit the use of so-called "conversion therapy" on minors.



The legislation ([Senate Bill 65](#)) defines the term as any practice or treatment that seeks to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, including any effort to alter behaviors and gender expressions or reduce same-sex attractions.

The legislation would impact licensed health care and mental health professionals, who would face disciplinary action for violations.

The pending law would also bar Delaware professionals from referring a patient or client to an out-of-state provider for such treatment.

Proponents of the bill, like House prime sponsor State Rep. Debra Heffernan, D-Bellefonte, say conversion or reparative therapy has been rejected by all mainstream medical and mental health organizations, is not proven to be effective, and could pose health risks for certain youths.

American Psychological Association President, Dr. Barry S. Anton, said in 2015: "So-called reparative therapies are aimed at 'fixing' something that is not a mental illness and therefore does not require therapy."



State Rep. Ruth Briggs King

State Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown, one of 17 House members who did not support the bill, said the legislation was unnecessary. "It

has already been deemed an unacceptable practice starting back in 1998," she said during the debate. "There is no college, no university, and no approved or accredited program that teaches reparative therapy. It is just not used in practice."

Other opponents of the bill noted that its scope is overly broad and intentionally meddling. "SB 65 will prevent clinical professionals from having open dialogues with their patients," said State Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro.

"Even if patients want to discuss reconciling their conflicted feelings to align with their actual sex, the law will bar it. It's wrong for the state to insert itself in between patients and their counselors to bias people wrestling with this issue to transition to a new sexual orientation or gender identity."

Rep. Collins said the legislation is similar to the Department of Education's original draft of Regulation 225, which had sought to allow students of any age to make decisions on their gender identity without any parental notification, input or consent. "This is another case of the state interfering in the relationship between parent and child concerning the sensitive subject of sexuality."



State Rep. Rich Collins

Nicole Theis, president & executive director of the Delaware Family Policy Council, maintains there is a proven association between childhood sexual abuse and sexual confusion. "Shouldn't minors be given the opportunity to explore the idea that their sexuality ... may have been forced upon them by their abusers?" she said, noting that SB 65 would make such discussions illegal.

The bill now heads to Gov. John Carney, who is expected to sign it into law.