



RICHMOND CITY
HEALTH DISTRICT

DATE: September 9, 2019
TO: The Honorable Members of City Council
FROM: The Richmond City Health District
RE: Prohibition of Conversation Therapy Practices
Res. No. 2019-R028

**PUBLIC COPY
PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE**

Honorable Council Members,

Richmond City Health District wishes to express support for resolution 2019-R028, as proposed, to prohibit conversion therapy practices, in order to protect the health of our community, particularly for youth and other vulnerable populations. The scientific, medical, and mental health communities now recognize and accept that diverse sexual orientations and gender identities exist and are not a result of mental illness. Multiple national medical and mental health professional organizations have expressed opposition to conversion therapy practices, including the American Psychological Association,¹ the American Psychiatric Association,² the American Medical Association,³ the American College of Physicians,⁴ and the American Academy of Pediatrics.⁵ In Virginia, the Board of Psychology has adopted guidance stating that the Board considers conversion therapy to have the potential for harm, in particular for minors.^{6,7}

This opposition is supported by the lack of scientific evidence to support the use of "conversion" or "reparative" therapy.^{8,9,10} In fact, a number of studies have highlighted the damaging effects such practices can have on individuals including increased anxiety, depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness, and suicide.^{9,11,12} In one of the largest cross-sectional surveys to date, 34,000 LGBTQ youth were asked if they had experienced conversion therapy. Of those who did, 42% reported attempting suicide, compared to 17% of those who had not.¹³ Despite this figure, an estimated 20,000 youth receive some form of conversion therapy each year in the United States.¹⁴ In the interest of protecting the health of Richmond's youth and vulnerable populations, we encourage the council to pass this resolution. If passed, Richmond would be in lockstep with 18 states and over 50 municipalities across the U.S.¹⁵

This resolution strengthens our ability to support our most vulnerable populations. By passing this resolution the council can commit to supporting an end to a damaging practice in our community, paving the way for the Commonwealth of Virginia to reject these practices. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support for resolution 2019-R028.

Justin Wallace, MPH
Human Services Supervisor
Richmond City Health District

Melissa Viray, MD
Deputy Director
Richmond City Health District

¹Conger, JI. Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the year 1974: Minutes of the annual meeting of the Council of Representatives. *American Psychologist*, 1975;30, 620-651.

²American Psychiatric Association. Position Statement on Conversion Therapy and LGBTQ Patients. https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/About_APA/Organization-Documents-Policies/Position-Conversion-Therapy.pdf. Accessed September 9, 2019.

³American Medical Association. Health care needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations #160.991. <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2019-03/transgender-conversion-issue-brief.pdf>. Updated 2018. Accessed August 30, 2019.

⁴American College of Physicians. American Psychological Association Task Force. Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; 2009.

⁵American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence. Homosexuality and Adolescence. *Pediatrics*, 1993;92:4.

⁶Virginia Board of Psychology Guidance Documents. Guidance document on the practice of conversion therapy 125-9. https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/psychology/psychology_guidelines.htm. Published 2019. Accessed August 30, 2019.

⁷Walker, J, & Albert, G. U.S. Joint statement by professional organizations warning against conversion therapy. *Gaylesta: The psychotherapist association for gender & sexual diversity*. <https://gaylesta.org/us-joint-statement>. Retrieved August 30, 2019.

⁸Drescher J. Can sexual orientation be changed? *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*. 2015;19:1. 84-93.

⁹Glassgold, JM, Beckstead, L, Drescher, J, et al, American Psychological Association. Task force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation. *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*. Published. 2009.

¹⁰American Psychological Association Task Force. *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; 2009.

¹¹Beckstead, AL, Morrow, SL. Mormon clients' experiences of conversion therapy: The need for a new treatment approach. *The Counseling Psychologist*. 2004 (32), 651-690.

¹²Nicolosi, J, Byrd, AD, Potts, RW. Retrospective self-reports of changes in homosexual orientation: A consumer survey of conversion therapy clients. *Psychological Reports*. 2000 (86), 1071-1088.

¹³The Trevor Project. National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2019.pdf>. Published 2019. Accessed August 30, 2019.

¹⁴Mallory, C, Brown, NTT, Conroy, KJ. The Williams Institute. *Conversion Therapy and LGBT Youth*. Los Angeles UCLA School of Law.

¹⁵Map: Movement Advancement Project. *Conversion Therapy Laws*. https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy. Published 2019. Accessed August 30, 2019.