

Good afternoon, distinguished Chair and esteemed members of this committee.

My name is Doug Booth, a dedicated member of the board of directors for the Grand Rapids LGBTQ Healthcare Consortium, an organization dedicated to improving healthcare access, experiences, and services to the LGBTQ community.

Today, I stand before you as a representative of a powerful coalition that I have tirelessly built over the past 18 months. Our coalition was formed with the purpose to advocate for the banning of conversion therapy within our state.

It is an honor to share my testimony and actively contribute to the crucial discussion of safeguarding the well-being of LGBTQ youth within our great state.

We must first acknowledge that not a single reputable medical association supports the efforts of conversion therapy within our nation.

The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Nursing Association among many others have labeled conversion therapy dangerous and lacking any scientific merit. Furthermore, there exists an ever-growing body of evidence showcasing the severe harm and risks associated with this practice.

Studies consistently reveal a significantly higher risk of mental health issues and suicidal attempts among individuals subjected to conversion therapy.

The enduring effects of this harmful practice burden survivors with an estimated additional \$85,000 in healthcare costs throughout their lives¹. Shockingly, this deplorable practice still persists within our own state.

The genesis of our coalition can be traced back to a pivotal moment in December 2021 when I watched the thought-provoking documentary "Pray Away" on Netflix.

This eye-opening documentary delves into the disturbing realities of conversion therapy practices within our nation, shedding light on their prevalence and harmful nature.

As we immersed ourselves in the narrative, memories of my own adolescence resurfaced, igniting a renewed sense of urgency and empathy within me.

During my formative high school years, I found myself surrounded by communities where conversations about the LGBTQ community were tainted with disgust and fueled by intense animosity.

Even at a tender age, I sensed deep within me that my feelings towards persons of the same gender deviated from societal norms.

Yet, rather than embracing my truth, I grappled with the fear of rejection and a fervent desire to conform.

I embarked on a painful journey to mold myself into what society deemed "normal," unknowingly subjecting myself to a self-imposed form of conversion therapy. This struggle to fit in was inadvertently reinforced by those around me - at school, in church, and even within my own family.

During those tumultuous years, I battled with severe depression, harbored persistent suicidal thoughts, and tragically, even made an attempt to end my own life.

Only years later, after accepting and embracing my authentic self, that I began to share my truth with others.

These deeply emotional recollections and the profound pain I experienced upon revisiting those memories serve as an unwavering catalyst for my determination as well as of our coalition to lift up our voices in the hope that positive change can occur.

Our resolute goal is to reach out to every young person who may be grappling with their identity, reminding them that the world is undeniably a better place with them as they are, rather than not at all.

Each and every signature has a reputation of being dedicated to this cause and is driven by the hope that, with the science behind us, by banning this harmful practice we will create a positive, long lasting impact and fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Our coalition has garnered support from over 1100 Michiganders, including healthcare providers, elected officials, business owners and community leaders, and over 60 prominent organizations such as University of Michigan Health-West, Bethany Christian Services, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, the West Michigan Partnership for Children, the Children's Advocacy Center of Kent County, and many more.

While we have focused on local bans, we soon realized the challenges related to enforcement at the local and city levels, compelling us to adapt our strategy multiple times. Following the 2022 midterms, we found a renewed hope and decided to redirect our focus on this issue at the state level.

In a time when the LGBTQ community faces hostility nationwide as the headlines attest daily now, Michigan has an opportunity to continue to shine as a beacon of hope.

We embrace the belief that our state should be a welcoming haven for all, recognizing the imperative of protecting the most vulnerable among us.

I express my deepest gratitude and wholeheartedly support the swift and timely passage of this vital legislation that will save the lives of our states LGBTQ youth.

Thank you
Doug Booth
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banconversiontherapymi.com