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NASW-NYC Supports a Ban on the Practice of Conversion Therapy On Minors in New York State

The NYC Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) acts in solidarity with the #bornperfect campaign of the National Center for Lesbian Rights and other professional membership associations in calling for a ban of conversion therapy in New York State. NASW-NYC calls upon the New York State Senate to pass Senate Bill S263, to designate the practice of conversion therapy with minors as professional misconduct.

Conversion therapy, “sometimes known as ‘reparative therapy,’ is a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression” (Human Rights Campaign). Since the inception of this practice, it has served as a dishonorable symbol of the reality that helping professionals, including social workers, can and do, in fact, cause harm when operating outside of our Codes of Ethics.

On April 25th, 2017, Senator Brad Hoylman and Assembly member Deborah Glick, and representatives from the National Association Social Workers NYC & NYS Chapters, New York State Psychiatric Association, New York State Society for Clinical Social Work, and New York Psychological Association held a joint press conference and collectively lobbied in Albany to lend a unified front of support across major mental health disciplines. Leaders cited that within each of their respective disciplines sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) are considered an unethical practice that is harmful and ineffective (add link to joint press release which should be posted on our website along with interview and photo with Hoylman & Glick).

The National Association of Social Workers released a position statement in May 2015 on sexual orientation and change efforts (SOCE). The statement declares “SOCE can negatively affect one’s mental health and...the practice of SOCE violates the very tenets of the social work profession as outlined in the *NASW Code of Ethics* including maintaining competence, fighting discrimination, and avoiding misrepresentation” (NASW, 2015). The NYC Chapter, as a local unit of NASW National, vehemently opposes conversion therapy.

In 2009, the American Psychological Association completed a report which highlighted risks for those who underwent conversion therapy, including: “depression, helplessness, hopelessness, social withdrawal, suicidality, substance abuse, decreased self-esteem, increased self-hatred, feelings of anger, loss of friends and potential romantic partners, problems in emotional intimacy, a feeling of being dehumanized, and a loss of faith.” (National Center for Lesbian Rights).

On February 6th, 2016, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an Executive Order, which prohibited Medicaid and Medicare from reimbursing practitioners of conversion therapy from charging insurances for its provision to minors. However, this does not replace a complete legislative ban on conversion therapy. Conversion therapy continues to be practiced today, in our very state and city and this is not only antithetical to the diverse state that is New York, it is unethical and a manifestation of systemic oppression.

A personal account of someone who underwent conversion therapy described it's horrors. A survivor shared, "the first step — which usually lasted six months — [is] where they 'deconstruct us as a person' using aversion therapy, shock therapy, harassment and occasional physical abuse. Their goal was to get us to hate ourselves for being LGBTQ. The second step of the program...removed us of everything that made us a unique person...and instead made us a walking, talking, robot. We were no longer people at the end of the program." (Huffington Post). Other forms of conversion therapy have also included hypnosis, cognitive and behavioral therapies, and even psychotropic medication.

During the last several years this piece of legislation that would, by statute, designate conversion therapy as professional misconduct, has passed through the Assembly, but never through the Senate. NASW-NYC will continue to act in solidarity with other organizations and groups in Albany by lobbying elected officials to support this bill. We strongly encourage social workers in NYC to do the same and lobby their elected officials for the passage of Senate Bill S263. NASW-NYC calls upon the profession to action in organizing for an end to conversion therapy. NASW-NYC calls on LGBTQ organizations, agency executives, the schools of social work, and coalition partners to act in solidarity against this discriminatory and draconian practice to have it banned permanently once and for all.

References:

Human Rights Campaign - <http://www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>

National Association of Social Workers. (2015). Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) and Conversion Therapy with Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals, and Transgender Persons. Washington DC. NASW

New York Daily News (2016) EXCLUSIVE: Gov. Cuomo to ban use of conversion therapy on LGBT youth by public and private health insurers. Available at: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/cuomo-announce-ban-conversion-therapy-lgbt-youths-article-1.2522458>

Nichols, J. (n.d.). A Survivor Of Gay Conversion Therapy Shares His Chilling Story. Huffington Post. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/realities-of-conversion-therapy_us_582b6cf2e4b01d8a014aea66

#BornPerfect: The Facts About Conversion Therapy. National Center for Lesbian Rights. <http://www.nclrights.org/bornperfect-the-facts-about-conversion-therapy/>