

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Human Rights Commission
DATE: February 11, 2019

On February 5, 2019¹, the City of Columbia Commission on Human Rights unanimously voted to work with the city's Law Department to draft legislation recommending the City of Columbia adopt an ordinance that would make conversion therapy administered upon juveniles by licensed professionals a class A misdemeanor. Similar legislation has passed and been implemented in other municipalities², most recently in Denver, Colorado³.

This action by the Commission on Human Rights comes after more than a year's worth of discussions and deliberations with community stakeholders and those with expertise in this area. The most recent of which, as you may recall, was at the during the February 4, 2019 City Council meeting where the Center Project provided public comment on the subject. It has been made clear to the Commission that the damaging and long lasting impact this type of therapy has on juvenile adults needs to be addressed by legislative action by city leaders.

Each year the national Human Rights Campaign issues the Municipal Equality Index⁴, a framework examining how inclusive municipal laws, policies, and services are of LGBTQ people who live and work there. Cities are rated based on non-discrimination laws, the municipality as an employer, municipal services, law enforcement policies and the city leadership's public positions on measures that ensure equality for all individuals who identify as LGBTQ . And, each year, the City of Columbia strives to improve its score on the Municipal Equality Index by evaluating our current programs, services, and policies against any updates to the MEI framework.

For example, in 2014, the City of Columbia received a 70 out of a possible 100 points, missing a significant amount of points in the section that measured the efforts of the city to ensure LGBT constituents are included in city services and programs, and the section that assessed the City of Columbia as an employer with relation to the offering of benefits and protections to LGBT employees among other items.

After this rating was published, with concerted effort from the Commission on Human Rights, alongside the support of various City departments and City leadership, the City of Columbia addressed these issues by exploring ways to make the city more inclusive toward those in the LGBT communities. Since then, the city has implemented these measures and has steadily

¹ <https://www.como.gov/CMS/webcal/event.php?id=10568>

² http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy

³ <https://denver.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3777044&GUID=A15AD8C4-B4D0-4F88-A401-07D1B9607CEB&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=conversion+therapy>

⁴ <https://www.hrc.org/mei>

seen an increase in the points awarded in these sections, growing from a 70/100, to most recently a 100/100 in 2017 and 2018⁵.

Each year, the framework for the National Human Rights Campaign's MEI is updated⁶ to address changing issues in equity for those in the LGBTQ community. For the 2018 index, the Human Rights Campaign has asked municipalities to explore the issue of conversation therapy. Conversion therapy encompasses a range of dangerous practices that seek to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. There is no credible evidence that conversion therapy can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. To the contrary, research has consistently shown that these practices pose devastating health risks for LGBTQ young people such as depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness, and even suicidal behavior. These practices have been condemned by the American Counseling Association⁷, American Medical Association⁸, and American Psychiatric Association⁹.

The Municipal Equality Index advocates that municipalities enact laws to protect youth from the harmful and discredited practice of conversion therapy, such as ordinances that prohibit licensed medical and mental health professionals from engaging in the practice with minors within city limits. In response to the 2018 MEI framework, the City of Columbia Commission on Human Rights has taken measure to explore both the human rights impact as well as the broader health implications of prohibiting - or allowing - such practices within our community since there are documented instances of such programming as well as conversion therapy youth camps operating in our community and surrounding areas.

In February 2018¹⁰, the Commission approached the Columbia/Boone County Board of Health, and requested that they look into the health implications of conversion therapy. Per the request of the Board of Health, a member of the Commission on Human Rights presented information and participated in public comments and questioning in a March 2018¹¹ hearing. Since that time, there have not been any updates on the status of the Board of Health's research into the issue. The Commission believes that the ramifications of such practices extend well beyond the arena of health and are in fact human rights issues that need to be addressed. We believe the timing to address conversion therapy is now.

⁵ https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/MEI-2018-Columbia-Missouri.pdf?_ga=2.5477043.1679782495.1549649331-1119805627.1547491935

⁶ <https://www.hrc.org/resources/standards-for-credit-on-the-mei>

⁷ <https://www.counseling.org/government-affairs/state-issues/conversion-therapy-bans>

⁸ <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/our-people/member-groups-sections/glb-advocacy-committee/ama-policy-regarding-sexual-orientation.page>

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http://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Advocacy%20and%20Newsroom/Position%20Statements/ps2000_ReparativeTherapy.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.como.gov/CMS/granicus/downloadfile.php?id=18046&type=attachment>

¹¹ <https://gocolumbiamo.legistar.com/MeetingDetail.aspx?ID=569894&GUID=222C4572-3BBC-4375-8158-4D6C6B1DBBD7&Options=&Search=>

A recent report¹² from the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law estimates that 698,000 LGBTQ adults in the United States have received conversion therapy, and 350,000 of these adults received the therapy as adolescents. The report goes on further to estimate in the 41 states in which it is not banned, 20,000 LGBTQ youth (ages 13-17) will receive conversion therapy from a licensed healthcare professional before the time they reach 18.

It is important to note that at this time, there are no cities in Missouri that prohibit conversion therapy for minors. However, members of the Missouri Legislature have begun to explore similar measures at the state level. In the current legislative session, Representative Tracy McCreery (D - 88) filed the Youth Mental Health Preservation Act (HB 516)¹³, which would prohibit licensed mental health practitioners from subjecting minors to harmful "conversion therapy" practices that attempt to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. HB 516 has attracted bipartisan support, including the support of local Representatives Martha Stevens (D-46) and Kip Kendrick (D-45).

The city of Columbia has the opportunity to show leadership not only within our community, but also in our state. It is because of the reasons outlined here that the Commission on Human Rights strongly recommends that the City of Columbia adopt an ordinance that would make prohibit conversion therapy from being administered to juveniles by licensed professionals and make any such violation of city ordinances class A misdemeanor.

Thank you for your time.

¹² <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Conversion-Therapy-LGBT-Youth-Jan-2018.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.house.mo.gov/Bill.aspx?bill=HB516&year=2019&code=R>