



Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity

# ALLIANCE

HOME OF THE NARTH INSTITUTE

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Dear Oakland Park, Florida Office of the Mayor and City Commission,

The legislature of the State of Florida recently rejected efforts to pass legislation that would ban access to professional therapy for minors who may be experiencing unwanted homosexual attractions. In response to this rejection some individuals are now attempting to convince individual Florida cities to pass municipal regulations that would impose such a ban on local therapists practicing in those cities or counties. If you are approached about considering this kind of local regulation, please consider this very important information:

**1. Municipal ordinances to regulate licensed, professional therapists are illegal.**

Our legal advisors at Liberty Counsel (please read the attached letter) inform us that cities do not have jurisdiction over licensed therapists. The state of Florida licenses and regulates psychological and medical professionals. As noted in the letter, municipalities "cannot legislate in a field if the subject area has been preempted to the State." The state of Florida allows therapists to offer therapy to minors who may be confused, questioning, or experiencing unwanted homosexual attractions, just as they can offer therapy to anyone distressed about any life situation. Florida has not passed any legislation that would ban any type of therapy for minors. Further, we and our legal counsel believe this sort of therapy ban is unconstitutional and note that the proposed Florida legislation to enact such a ban did not even make it out of committee. Please be aware that a lawsuit is currently being prepared by Liberty Counsel against another Florida city which recently passed a regulation to ban therapy for minors in their municipality.

**2. Ordinances that restrict access to licensed professional therapists are harmful to children and teens.**

This type of suggested ordinance will be extremely detrimental to many individuals. Please consider just a few of the many possible examples of potential harm:

- a. When depressed teenagers are not be able to get the professional help that *they* desire to help them live lives congruent with their values, faith, and/or life goals depression can increase and even suicidal ideation could become more likely.
- b. Children and adolescents who have been exposed to pornography in general and homosexual pornography in particular can have disturbing and confusing images in their mind and these children would be denied the help they need to process their response to these distressing impressions or address troubling homosexual fantasies.
- c. Adolescents who have been sexually abused by a same-sex adult or near peer in childhood often begin acting out as a direct response to their abuse and they would be denied the professional assistance they need to address any resulting homosexual thoughts or behaviors.
- d. It is not uncommon for young children to be confused or insecure about their gender identity. For example, a six year old girl and her two brothers are being raised by their father. With no female role model in her home she may lack female bonding and be insecure in her identity. This type of ordinance could deny her the professional help she needs to overcome this sexual or gender confusion.

**3. These suggested ordinances claim to address a problem with licensed therapists that really doesn't exist.**

If a professional therapist or licensed counselor is acting unethically or practicing in a way that harms their clients the state of Florida has an existing, active board charged with removing the license from or disciplining any offending practitioner. In spite of the outlandish claims of therapist abuse by professionals practicing "conversion therapy" (a confusing and indefinable

term) put forward by those recommending these local ordinances they are unable to name a single licensed therapist who is committing such alleged abuses. In addition, no so called "conversion" therapist has ever lost their license to practice in the state of Florida for harming a client. Please keep in mind that therapy we are talking about is just *voluntary* talk therapy. No professional therapist will work with any teenager against their will or expressed desire. Trying to help any person who doesn't want help is never ethical and never successful. And counseling therapists do not use aversive techniques. To address a much abused example - shock treatments are only performed in hospital settings by medical doctors for specific conditions, such as depression, mania, etc. These are never used by licensed counselors or therapists and never for issues related to homosexual attractions. These local ordinances are unnecessary and seem to be merely an opportunity to shame same-sex attracted individuals who are uncomfortable embracing homosexual behaviors or identity and demonize licensed therapists who are willing to help them manage or decrease those attractions.

**4. These suggested ordinances rob individuals and families of a basic freedom - their right to choose what they can talk about in a confidential therapy session.**

We should remember that these proposed ordinances are banning *talk* therapy. Sponsors of this ban are asking you to make it illegal for therapists and their clients to have confidential conversations about the client's hopes, dreams, and personal goals if their goals concern their unwanted sexual attractions or behavior. This abuse of our basic freedom of association and speech would be unthinkable if we were talking about any subject other than homosexuality or gender confusion. Even if you disagree with a teenager who experiences homosexual attractions and chooses not to embrace a gay identity. Even if you are an active supporter of gay and transgender rights surely you would still support freedom of choice and freedom of private speech for everyone in America. What could be the possible justification for lawmakers - for the first time in history - reaching into the confidential therapy office to direct how a citizen can respond to their sexual thoughts and feelings?

If someone approaches you suggesting that you consider passing an ordinance to protect homosexual teenagers from "dangerous" therapies please consider the tremendous cost to your neighbors and friends of this type of ill-advised regulation. The cost in lives and harm to children and teens who need access to professional therapists. The cost in freedom when we tell individuals and families what they can and cannot talk about to licensed professionals that they voluntarily select. The cost of defending underfunded local municipalities from expensive court challenges to potentially illegal ordinances that are the rightful province of state government.

Please feel free to contact us if we can answer any questions or be of assistance to you in any way. Thank you so much for reading our letter!

The Board of Directors  
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