Massachusetts Becomes the 16th State to Ban Conversion Therapy

BY CESIRA NEWCOMB • APRIL 10, 2019

On April 8, 2019, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker signed the Counseling Ban, a bill prohibiting LGBTQ+ conversion therapy for minors in the Commonwealth. The governor follows the lead of the Massachusetts State House (147-8) and Senate (34-0, 5 abstentions) who passed the measure in prior weeks.

Massachusetts joins California, D.C., Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington in banning conversion therapy. Specifically, the Counseling Ban bars licensed state therapists from conducting or promoting "sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts with a patient who is less than 18 years of age."

The medical and science community have long argued that conversion therapy that encourages children to change their sexual orientation is harmful because it fosters depression, self-hate and intolerance. However, the bill has some wondering where to draw the line between healthy talk therapy and improper encouragement.

Those opposed to the Counseling Ban argue that it violates parental rights to raise children, religious liberty and freedom of speech of mental healthcare providers. The critics argue the bill deprives young people who may want conversion therapy of the medical attention they seek. In a press release, Massachusetts Family Institute asserted that the bill "effectively den[ies] critical mental health treatment to sexually confused youth in Massachusetts," and pledged to pursue legal action.

Any determination of the bill's constitutionality will have to come from the Courts.

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