

The Hon. Marko Liias
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA. 98504-0600

January 10, 2014

Dear Representative Liias:

The Washington State Psychological Association (WSPA) supports your intent to introduce legislation to restrict the practice of sexual orientation change (SOCE) therapies to minors in our state.

Both WSPA and the American Psychological Association (APA) oppose the use of SOCE therapies, as do all major mental and other health organizations in this country. This sort of counseling is based on the notion that same sex attraction is inferior to heterosexual attraction, dysfunction or just plain wrong. It is the policy of both APA and WSPA that same sex attraction, love, families, feelings and behaviors are normal appropriate aspects of human sexuality.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Washington State Legislature has passed the marriage equality law, we still face negative attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals, families and adolescents. Additionally, our members continue to treat patients who suffer the results of SOCE treatments they were required to undergo as adolescents. Our colleague, Dr. Doug Haldeman, a nationally recognized expert in this field, testified before you in the spring of 2013. Here are some excerpts from that testimony:

“In 1983, the first person I saw who had been obliged to undergo SOCE as an adolescent was a man who had had low-voltage electric shock applied to his hands and his genitals while viewing homoerotic materials...the treatment did not make him heterosexual, but it did leave him suicidally depressed, ridden with guilt, and dysfunctional in his relationships.

SOCE can be particularly dangerous for adolescents because of the vulnerability of developing brain structures during this time of life.”

In his over 30 years of working with patients who had endured SOCE, never did Dr. Haldeman see one for whom SOCE worked. The damage, however, is incalculable. In 2009, APA published the findings of its Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. The Task Force found that not only is there no scientific basis for positive results of SOCE, but also declare that SOCE is likely to pose significant potential dangers for mental health, particularly for vulnerable youth.



WSPA will be happy to provide you with supporting documentation and research. We fully support this legislative effort. Thank you.

Lucy A. Homans, Ed.D.
Director of Professional Affairs on behalf of
The members of the Washington State Psychological Association