

MEMO TO: House Health Care & Wellness Committee
FROM: The Washington State Psychological Association (WSPA)
ABOUT: SSB 5870
March 21, 2015

The Washington State Psychological Association (WSPA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments about SSB 5870, protecting youth from aversive mental health therapies.

WSPA enthusiastically supported this bill in its original form. However, we have significant concerns about the substitute that passed the Senate and is before you now. The substitute bill has removed all reference to therapies, including talk therapies, the goals of which are to change same sex attraction to heterosexual orientation.

To be clear, WSPA supports the prohibition of aversive therapies listed in SSB 5870. These aversion therapies are never effective and are not a standard of practice in psychology. WSPA would argue that the use of aversive therapies listed in SSB5870 (Section 2(a)(b) would already be considered acts of unprofessional conduct, not to mention completely unethical by the standards of the American Psychological Association Ethical Standards for Psychologists.

We must also be clear that therapies that purport to be effective in changing a patient's sexual orientation should also be defined as an act of unprofessional conduct in the state Uniform Disciplinary Act (18.130 RCW). To repeat testimony provided by WSPA in 2013 and 2014, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Practice and many other reputable organizations discredit these therapies.

There is no scientific justification for the use of sexual orientation therapies, be it talk therapies or other aversive therapies. These therapies are potentially dangerous to adolescents because developing brains are particularly vulnerable to this sort of emotional stress (see Haldeman, D. in testimony to the House Health & Wellness Committee, April 2013). Sexual orientation change therapies are never effective nor appropriate and are always unethical treatment protocols.

WSPA urges the committee to consider passage of the of SB 5870, the bill in its original form. Questions may be referred to Dr. Lucy Homans, Director of Professional Affairs, Washington State Psychological Association, lucy.homans@gmail.com. Thank you.