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SB 1172 – RISKS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION CHANGE EFFORTS

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Co-Sponsors: Equality California, Mental Health America of Northern California, National Center for Lesbian Rights

IN BRIEF

This bill would prohibit a psychotherapist from engaging in sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) without first disclosing the risk of harm and obtaining the patient's informed consent. The bill would also prohibit SOCE with respect to minors.

BACKGROUND

SOCE poses critical health risks to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, including depression, shame, decreased self-esteem, social withdrawal, substance abuse, risky behavior, and suicidality. There is virtually no credible evidence that any type of psychotherapy can change a person's sexual orientation, and, in fact, SOCE may cause serious and lasting harms. Nearly all the nation's leading mental health associations, including the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists have studied SOCE and issued cautionary position statements on its utilization. Minors who experience family rejection based on their sexual orientations face especially serious health risks. In one study, lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection.¹

EXISTING LAW

Existing law provides for licensing and regulation of various mental health professionals, including physicians and surgeons, psychologists, psychiatric technicians, marriage and family therapists, educational psychologists, clinical social workers, and licensed professional clinical counselors.

WHAT THIS BILL WOULD DO

SB 1172 would prohibit psychotherapists from performing SOCE in the absence of informed consent, which would be provided on a form that specifies the significant risks and side effects involved and discloses the views of leading medical and mental health associations on these practices. The bill would also prohibit the use of SOCE on minors, regardless of the willingness of a parent or guardian to authorize such efforts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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¹ See Caitlyn Ryan et al, "Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults," 123 PEDIATRICS 346 (2009).