

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 97 (regarding practices to change sexual orientation and gender identity in minors)
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
The General Court [Legislature] of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Boston, Massachusetts
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My name is Peter Sprigg, and I represent the Family Research Council from Washington, DC.

However, I am a former resident of Massachusetts. I am a graduate of both Fitchburg High School and of Gordon-Conwell Theological School in South Hamilton, and I was an aide to U.S. Rep. Robert Drinan in his district office in Waltham.

This bill's title refers to "abusive practices" to change sexual orientation and gender identity in minors. All of us oppose truly "abusive practices" toward those ends. Some horror stories are often cited, such as the use of coercion or extreme aversive therapies.

There are two problems with these arguments. First, there is no evidence that such techniques are being used anywhere in the United States today. Second, the prohibition in this bill is not limited to such "abusive" techniques. Instead, it would outlaw ordinary talk therapy, conducted in an ordinary counselor's office, even if the client not only consents to, but desperately seeks this care.

Advocates of legislation like this make two central claims—that sexual orientation change efforts (or SOCE) are ineffective, and that they are harmful. What is the scientific evidence for these claims?

There is none—particularly with respect to minors, the population addressed by this bill. Although the American Psychological Association discourages such therapy, even their widely-quoted 2009 task force report came up empty in its search for an empirical foundation—beyond mere anecdotal evidence—for these two key arguments against it.

The task force reported, "There is a lack of published research on SOCE among children"¹ under age 12. It went on to say, "We found no empirical research on adolescents [age 12-18] who request SOCE."² Regarding adult clients, the APA reported *anecdotal* evidence of both benefits and harms, but ultimately declared that "the recent studies do not provide valid causal evidence of the efficacy of SOCE or of its harm."³

This bill infringes upon privacy, confidentiality, and client self-determination; and upon free speech and, in some cases, the free exercise of religion. Such infringements would require the weightiest of scientific evidence to support them—evidence that is completely absent.

I urge you to oppose House Bill 97.

¹ “Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation,” American Psychological Association, [“APA Task Force”], p. 72.
<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>.

² “APA Task Force,” p. 73.

³ “APA Task Force,” p. 42.