

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Suffolk Legislators Call on Albany to Act Now and End Conversion "Therapy"

*In the Wake of the Orlando Shooting, Suffolk Legislators Push the State to Ban the Practice of
Sexual Orientation Change Efforts Supported by Pseudoscience*

Hauppauge, NY - Suffolk County Legislature Health Chairman William R. Spencer, M.D., was joined by LGBT Network CEO David Kilmnick and Legislators Calarco, Hahn, Fleming and Lindsay at a press conference on Wednesday urging the New York State Senate to take action and pass Senate Bill 121, banning the practice of conversion "therapy." Currently the legislation is at a standstill in the Senate Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee and would require Senate leadership to release it from committee to bring it to the floor for a vote. With the legislative session slated to close Thursday, June 16, 2016, time is off the essence.

"This practice is a relic of the dark days when homosexuality was considered a mental illness and it perpetuates the damaging lie that sexuality is a condition that needs to be treated. New York should be a leader on the issue and put an end to this pseudoscience that has harmful lasting impacts on LGBT youth." stated Legislator William R. Spencer M.D. "The medical community stands in opposition of these practices as they are damaging and unethical; it's about time that our laws follow suit." Numerous organizations have issued statements against sexual orientation and gender identity conversion efforts including, the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the American School Counselor Association, and the National Association of School Psychologists.

"Conversion therapy is a dangerous practice that sends a message to LGBT people and the greater world that there is something wrong and flawed with being LGBT and something that needs to be 'fixed'. It is this kind of ancient thinking that leads to hate and violence and results in tragic events in our country like the massacre in Orlando of 49 people at an LGBT club. The time has long passed to stop all anti-LGBT rhetoric and practices and instead focus on how we can make sure everyone is fully equal under the law and safe in our communities. We applaud Legislator Spencer and the members of the Suffolk County Legislature for their continued leadership in ensuring the well-being and safety of the LGBT Community" said Dr. David Kilmnick, CEO of the LGBT Network.

Years of research and experience have demonstrated that one's sexual preference or gender identity does not change in psychotherapy and the scientific validity of psychotherapeutic attempts to "repair" homosexuality are damaging. Additionally, such treatments can pose dangerous risks to the well-being of patients, especially minors. Potential risks of "conversion therapy" include: depression, guilt, suicidal ideation, helplessness, shame, social withdrawal, decreased self-esteem, increase self-hatred, sexual and emotional intimacy problems, loss of friends and romantic partners, high risk behaviors, feelings of anger and betrayal, hostility and blame toward parents, and substance abuse.

"Conversion therapy is the opposite of therapy. At a time of vulnerability, individuals seeking psychological support in the face of intolerance should be met with support and guidance not be subjected to further conflict," stated Deputy Presiding Officer Legislator Robert Calarco.

"I am horrified by last Sunday's tragedy in Orlando. My heart is aching for the people of Orlando and the LGBT community. There are concrete steps that New York State can take to correct systemic injustices that affect the LGBT Community and among them are banning conversion therapy which is an extremely harmful practice." Majority Leader Kara Hahn went on to say, "As a mother and social worker, I am devastated by the thought that parents are going underground to try to 'torture the gay out of' their children and that people are posing as therapeutic helpers when in fact they are contributing to long-term psychiatric harm. I was pleased to join all of my colleagues in the Legislature in calling on New York State to finally outlaw this practice".

"The practice of conversion therapy is based on two falsehoods, first that being LGBT is a flaw that needs to be fixed, and second that being LGBT is something that can be changed. I urge the State Senate to ban this cruel and alienating practice, especially in the wake of tragedy that took place in Orlando this past weekend." said Legislator Bridget Fleming.

Laws banning conversion therapy have been passed in California, New Jersey, the District of Columbia, Oregon, Illinois, and the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. Earlier this year Governor Cuomo announced executive actions to ban insurance coverage of conversion therapy. The actions banned public and private health care insurers from covering the practice in New York State, and also prohibited various mental health facilities across the state from conducting the practice on minors. Passage of S121 would make the ban the law of the land.

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