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Leading Statewide Mental Health Professional Associations Applaud Senate & Assembly Passage of Legislation to Prohibit So-Called “Conversion Therapy” for Minors

(ALBANY, NY) – The New York State Psychiatric Association, The National Association of Social Workers – New York City and New York State Chapters, The New York Society for Clinical Social Work, and The New York State Psychological Association applaud the Senate and Assembly’s passage of legislation A.576/S.1046 today, sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan) and Assembly Member Deborah Glick (D-Manhattan), that will prohibit licensed mental health professionals from engaging in efforts to change a minor’s sexual orientation, otherwise referred to as “conversion” or “reparative” therapy.

Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan) said, “Today we passed legislation to ban so-called conversion therapy, outlawing this dangerous and utterly discredited practice once and for all. I’m proud to stand with Assemblymember Glick, Senator Gianaris, my legislative colleagues, the leaders of the NYS Psychiatric Association, the National Association of Social Workers – New York City and New York State Chapters, the New York Society for Clinical Work, and the New York State Psychological Association, in the fight to ensure that all people, regardless of who they are or who they love, are treated with dignity and respect.”

Assembly Member Deborah Glick (D-Manhattan) said, “Not only is so-called 'conversion therapy' a discredited practice, it is highly destructive. This pseudo-scientific practice, which has been denounced by every major medical and professional organization, must be stopped. With the passage of this legislation in both the Assembly and Senate, finally our children will be protected from this discriminatory and damaging practice.”

The enactment of this law comes at a crucial time as The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at UCLA School of Law estimates nearly 350,000 youth have endured so-called “conversion therapy” with another 77,000 at risk in states that have not acted to prohibit

or restrict the practice, which has been shown to have long-term detrimental consequences, such as increased risk of depression, suicidal ideation, substance use, social withdrawal, and self-loathing. The enactment of this legislation builds on the leadership of Governor Cuomo, who in 2016 took executive action to prohibit insurers, health plans and Medicaid from covering and reimbursing so-called “conversion therapy” as well as barring it for minors in mental health facilities operated or funded by the State.

Barry B. Perlman, M.D, former president of the New York State Psychiatric Association and past chair of the New York State Mental Health Services Council said, “The New York State Psychiatric Association made the protection of youth central to its legislative agenda. When combined with the Governor’s previous executive actions, the enactment of this legislation provides among the most comprehensive and enduring protections any State has adopted to date to protect their youth from this discredited practice.”

Jack Drescher, M.D., renowned author and lecturer on the issue of sexual orientation change efforts who was among the leads drafting the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) 2000 position statement on the issue, noted the passage and enactment of this legislation comports with the position of the APA, “Recognizing there is no scientific or empirical evidence that conversion therapies work and, in fact, there is evidence of harm, every major medical and professional organization has repudiated the efficacy of ‘conversion therapy,’ a practice that can only heighten feelings of isolation and despair in a population that is at greater risk for depression, suicide and substance use disorders.”

Dr. Marsha Wineburgh, LCSW, representing the New York State Society for Clinical Social Work (NYSSCSW) concurred with colleagues noting “every person has the right to explore and discover their own sexual orientation. It is a natural process of human development; being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is not an illness, disease or short coming and should not be treated as such. So-called ‘conversion therapy’ perpetuates the false and unscientific views to the public, particularly our youth of needing treatment or a cure.”

Mathew Shurka, co-founder and chief strategist of Born Perfect, a nationwide campaign to end conversion therapy, who endured five years of so-called “conversion therapy” said, “Today’s action by the Senate and Assembly is truly historic for LGBTQ youth all across New York State, and I thank Senator Hoylman and Assemblymember Glick for their leadership and longstanding commitment to this important legislation. Having gone through conversion therapy here in New York and thankfully not attempting suicide during my hardest times, I am uplifted by the incredible action taken today under the leadership of Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie along with the Governor Cuomo’s actions and resolve to protect all LGBTQ youth. I hope the enactment of this legislation sends a loud and unequivocal message nationwide that all LGBTQ people are not sick and Born Perfect.”

Herb Gingold, Ph.D., past president of the New York State Psychological Association echoed such a sentiment, said, “Every single legitimate mental health association standing here today rejects the notion that a same-sex orientation is abnormal, however, absent legislation, young people like Mathew, may still be influenced, browbeaten, or forced into illegitimate treatments to change what isn’t broken; doing psychological damage along the way. We strongly support this legislation to protect the youth of our state from exploitation and harm.”

Dr. Claire Green-Forde, executive director of the National Association of Social Workers – New York City Chapter (NASW-NYC), further stressed the need for a statutory prohibition, “As social workers, we are committed to human rights across race, diversity and intersectionality, which means the right to BE. Sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), including conversion therapy, is diametrically opposed to this right as its goal is to change a part of another human being’s very identity. We view conversion therapies as part of systemic oppression against the LGBTQ community.”

Samantha Howell, Esq., executive director of the National Association of Social Workers – New York State Chapter (NASW-NYS) said, “Social workers have an obligation to maintain the highest standards of ethical practice. The use of so-called “reparative” or “conversion therapies” violate the core values of the profession and run contrary to the mounting body of evidence revealing it to be extremely dangerous. We are pleased that the leaders in Albany also recognize the very serious risks that these practices pose. NASW-NYS thanks the Legislature for the action taken today, ensuring that the rights of all New Yorkers are protected.

Frank Dowling, M.D., a practicing psychiatrist and member of the NYS Psychiatric Association and Secretary and Commissioner of Science and Public Health of the Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY), added a professional and personal perspective, “As a psychiatrist and parent of a transgender son, I am horrified to think of how harmful such practices of ‘so-called conversion therapy’ could have been if used on my own child. I’m grateful that we as a family were aware of how important family and community support can be, and how to steer clear of charlatans and frauds who would seek to ‘convert’ someone instead of seeking to learn, understand, accept and adapt based on such understanding of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity.”