

Oklahoma Psychiatric Physicians Association Position Statement Regarding House Bill 1004 February 11, 2021

House Bill 1004 was brought to the attention of the Oklahoma Psychiatric Physicians Association (OPPA). Due to the harmful, prejudiced nature of the bill and the overwhelming opposition immediately voiced by many of our members, we are compelled to release a Position Statement against this bill.

House Bill 1004 allows for the pursuit of what is known as conversion therapy, and as stated in the bill, is provided “in order to control or end any unwanted sexual attraction.” According to the bill “parents may obtain such counseling or therapy for their children under eighteen (18) years of age without interference by the state.” It further states that addressing unwanted sexual attraction is “an emergency and immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety.”

The OPPA is in complete disagreement with these non-medically founded statements. Upholding a bill of this nature could lead directly to the severe harm, suffering and psychological detriment of our citizens, including children. It is the responsibility of the state of Oklahoma to share the interest of the OPPA in protecting the physical and psychological well-being of all the citizens of Oklahoma, including and especially minors, and in protecting its citizens against exposure to serious harms caused by sexual orientation change efforts including reparative and conversion therapies.

Since 1973, The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has maintained the position that homosexuality is not a mental disorder. In 1998, the APA Board of Trustees issued a position statement that they oppose any psychiatric treatment such as reparative or conversion therapy, based on the assumption that homosexuality is a mental disorder. It reiterated this stance in its 2000 Position Statement on Therapies Focused on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation. This stance is shared by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association, The National Association of Social Workers, among others. The OPPA is a district branch of the APA and does not waver from this stance.

In 2012, The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry stated “Clinicians should be aware that there is no evidence that sexual orientation can be altered through therapy, and that attempts to do so may be harmful. Indeed, there is no medically valid basis for attempting to prevent homosexuality, which is not an illness. On the contrary, such efforts may encourage family rejection and undermine self-esteem, connectedness and caring, important protective factors against suicidal ideation and attempts. Given that there is no evidence that efforts to alter sexual orientation are effective, beneficial or necessary, and the possibility that they carry the risk of significant harm, such interventions are contraindicated.”

Internationally, The Pan American Health Organization, a regional office of the World Health Organization, issued a statement in May of 2012, “These supposed conversion therapies constitute a violation of the ethical principles of health care and violate human rights that are protected by international and regional agreements.” The organization also noted that reparative therapies “lack medical justification and represent a serious threat to the health and well-being of affected people.”

It is our expectation that the legislatures of the State of Oklahoma will recognize that this bill is in direct violation of human rights and dignity. It places our citizens directly in harm’s way and we cannot, as psychiatrists and as citizens of Oklahoma, turn our backs on a bill that is in direct conflict with national and international policies regarding these unscientific, ineffective, and harmful approaches to mental health care. We strongly oppose this bill that is also in direct conflict with our primary responsibility for the care of the patients of Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Psychiatric Physicians Association, a district branch of the American Psychiatric Association, is a medical specialty society of over 200 psychiatrists, both M.D. and D.O. physicians, who each specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional illnesses and substance abuse disorders.