

Columbia City Council: Reject AG Wilson's Demands and Keep LGBTQ+ Youth Safe in Columbia

On Tuesday, April 22nd Attorney General Alan Wilson [sent a letter to the Columbia City Council](#) ordering them to repeal City Ordinance 2021-021, more commonly known as the conversion therapy ban. This city ordinance was passed in 2021 and aims to protect LGBTQ+ youth from the harmful and discredited practice.

Similar to his claims in 2022, Wilson is challenging the constitutionality of the ordinance stating it restricts the ability of counselors to engage in "religiously oriented therapy" and violates the South Carolina Medical Ethics and Diversity Act. His position threatens not only this policy, but also the ability of our local government to create policies that protect us as residents.

As local LGBTQ+ leaders and allies of the LGBTQ+ community, we vehemently reject the notion that "conversion therapy" is misunderstood as Wilson claims. Conversion/reparative practices are not only ineffective, but cause severe trauma to individuals and their families. These are practices that every major medical and mental health organization opposes. Those who practice conversion therapy or what Wilson is calling "religiously oriented therapy" are preying on the insecurities of families who want to support their loved ones. This ordinance doesn't impinge on the religious freedom of mental health providers, but instead holds those with license accountable to evidence based practices. This is not a matter of individual religious freedom, but of public health.

Conversion therapy will harm future generations of LGBTQ+ youth if this ban is lifted.

According to the Trevor Project's [2022 National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health](#), "60% of LGBTQ+ youth who wanted mental health care in the past year were not able to get it". There is a shortage across all health professions in the United States, and for those seeking LGBTQ+ affirming providers it's even more of a challenge to obtain quality care. The Trevor Project also reported, "those LGBTQ+ youth who live in a community that is accepting of LGBTQ+ people reported significantly lower rates of attempting suicide than those who do not."

Repealing this ordinance tells our youth, and subsequently our adults, that Columbia knows the harm "conversion therapy" causes, and is bending to specific ideology regardless of the extreme risk it poses to the lives of those in our community who are forced to endure it.

We the undersigned urge the City Council to maintain the ordinance as it stands, for one person's conceptual liberty is not greater than another person's real life.

Sincerely the leaders of (in alphabetical order)

ACLU of South Carolina

The Agape Table

Harriet Hancock Center

Reformation Lutheran Church

SC Equality
South Carolina Black Pride
South Carolina Pride
St. Martin's-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church
Transgender Awareness Alliance
Yew Belong Community Services