



To: Judiciary Committee
From: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
Subject: LB167 (Conversion Therapy) (Oppose)
Date: February 7, 2019

Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church by engaging, educating, and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public. I am here today to express opposition for LB167.

The Catholic faith recognizes the supreme dignity of every person as made in the image and likeness of God. The only appropriate response to this reality is charity, willing the good of the other. Charity extends to every aspect of our lives, including the ways by which we counsel and assist those who present themselves with any number of life's problems.

LB167 attempts to deal with the phenomenon of "conversion therapy" that has been utilized in counseling settings. Undoubtedly, conversion therapy is a loaded term and, like any such term, it includes a number of problematic dimensions but also includes a number of benign dimensions. The task before us today is to make critical and necessary distinctions between those two things.

It seems universally acknowledged that the problematic dimensions of conversion therapy are inappropriate, unhelpful, unsafe, and unethical. And disciplining those who utilize such practices is already appropriately handled by the relevant professional licensing body.

Unfortunately, despite the introducer's own comments about her bill, LB167 is not only restricted to this notion of harmful conversion therapy, but also includes practices such as talk therapy, which helps clients choose the counseling and personal therapy goals best for them through the ability to explore the issues they present.¹ The overly broad definition of "conversion therapy" in LB167 is deeply problematic, which has been made clear through the oral and written personal testimony this committee has received. Allow me to offer a few possible examples to further illustrate this point.

Sec. 3(1) applies this definition of conversion therapy to licensed credential holders and minors.

¹ LB167 defines "conversion therapy" as "practices or treatments that seek to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, including efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same gender" (*see* Sec. 3(4)(1)(i)).



Consider a 17-year old male who experiences sexual or romantic attractions for somebody of the same sex. He considers these attractions to be unwanted and desires not to act on these attractions and live chastely. He would not be able to see a mental health care provider to work through these attractions and find a way to seek his own goal of living a fully integrated human sexuality that is consistent with his moral convictions.

As well, the scope of Sec. 3(2) is harrowing, as it applies to *any* person who provides talk therapy.

Consider a pastor who runs a support group for same-sex attracted individuals through a church-run ministry. The ministry is scheduled to have an upcoming half-day seminar on human sexuality, which will include small group discussions about living chastity with a same-sex attraction. The half-day seminar is advertised through local Christian radio stations, newspapers, and church-related media (e.g., website, bulletins, etc.). Such a half-day seminar would fall violate Sec. 3(2)(b) and be liable to deceptive trade practices under Sec. 3(3).

Consider an orthodox Jewish temple that provides its members access to a part-time counselor. The temple provides the counselor monetary compensation for their services. The counselor assists members with a variety of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, relationship issues. As well, the counselor does address issues related to human sexuality. A 40-year old married woman, with three children, approaches the counselor presenting a same-sex attraction she feels for another woman at work. She wants to voluntarily work through her same-sex attraction because she desires to live according to her faith commitment she has made to her husband through marriage. In other words, she wants to reduce her sexual attraction for the other woman and live chastity in accord with her sincerely held Jewish faith. The counseling she would receive to achieve these self-determined goals would violate Sec. 3(2)(a).

LB167 entails a number of other issues, such as the breadth of including *all* credential holders under the Uniform Credential Act, problematic definitions of gender expression and gender identity, and restrictions on the state and political subdivisions to provide assistance and contract with entities that engage in talk therapy.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference urges your opposition for LB167 and requests that you indefinitely postpone them. Thanks for your time and consideration.