

# Anchorage Assembly passes ban on conversion therapy

By Kavitha George, Alaska Public Media - Anchorage - August 27, 2020



*An Alaska Pride flag. The image is based on a double-headed eagle design from Alaska before Russian contact. (Creative Commons photo by Mel Green)*

The Anchorage Assembly voted to ban conversion therapy for minors on Wednesday, after a two-day public hearing. Conversion therapy, as defined in the ordinance, is a practice that seeks to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. It has been discredited and condemned by the [American Psychological Association](#) and many other [medical](#) and [civil rights](#) organizations.

The Assembly ultimately passed the ban 9 to 2, with Chugiak/Eagle River assemblywomen Jamie Allard and Crystal Kennedy voting against.

"This is a bill that would save lives, and it will when we pass it tonight," said Assemblywoman Austin Quinn-Davidson, a lesbian woman and one the sponsors.

The ordinance prevents licensed professionals such as therapists or school counselors from engaging in efforts to change a minor's sexual orientation or gender identity. It passed with one amendment to reinforce the rights of parents to provide counsel to their children, and another that exempts clergy members who are acting in a religious capacity.

During two days of public hearing this week, the majority of call-in testifiers were against the ban. They cited concerns about the ban encroaching on freedoms of speech and religion and parental rights. Some called it overreach of the assembly's powers. A few leaned on negative stereotypes about LGBTQ individuals, including Quinn-Davidson and other gay members of the assembly.

"I received emails saying that I'm a pedophile or that I was molested as a child. Someone said that tonight," she said. "We're people. We're real people. And when you say those things to us, it doesn't hurt, because it's wrong and we're used to it. But it's sad. It's sad that that's where our culture is. But I know that we will keep moving forward, and things will get better."

In her closing remarks, Kennedy called the ordinance "one-sided."

"We could have spent some time really trying to make this work without causing confusion, without criminalizing our school counselors for crying out loud," she said. "All of this is too broad."

Those who testified in favor of the ban called conversion therapy child abuse, and pointed out that it results in higher suicide rates among LGBTQ youth. Some had experienced the practice themselves, and detailed the lifelong traumatic effects of conversion therapy they said they were forced to undergo as children.

Assemblyman Chris Constant applauded the assembly for supporting and protecting gay youth.

"We have heard from members in this community who have been harmed by this practice. Not 20 years ago or 30 years ago, but in the last five years. But hopefully, the message gets out [that] in Anchorage, it's not allowed to do this if you're a professional counselor."

Anchorage joins 20 states and dozens of cities across the country that have passed conversion therapy bans in the past ten years.

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