



**Northern Light
Health™**

**LD 1025 An Act To Prohibit the Provision of Conversion Therapy to Minors by Certain
Licensed Professionals**

Testimony in Support

April 10, 2019

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson and I am here today providing testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations to speak in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 9 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy and a state wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with over 12,000 employees statewide.

The comments I present today were developed with input from Northern Light Acadia Hospital. Our pediatric behavioral health services are based on scientific evidence and are family and youth focused. Acadia pediatric behavioral health services are designed to make a positive lifelong difference for the children and families that we serve. In 2018 we cared for 300 pediatric patients and their families.

The bill before you today creates a legal definition of conversion therapy, prohibits providing conversion therapy to minors and establishes legislative intent that outlines the public interest in protecting youth in Maine from the harmful effects of conversion therapy. We support all aspects of this legislation.

Studies document that conversion therapy does not work to successfully change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Rather, it can be extremely harmful to youth. Young people who have been subjected to conversion therapy are at increased risk of depression, shame, helplessness, hopelessness, guilt, anxiety, social withdrawal, suicidality, and substance abuse. Across the country, state and national medical, mental health, and child welfare organizations all oppose the practice of conversion therapy. States are also recognizing the harm of conversion therapy with fifteen states passing laws protecting minors from this practice. New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts are among the fifteen states.

It is our role to provide education and support to families that may be struggling with the behavioral health needs of their children. Our clinicians provide factual evidence-based information in a non-judgmental educational approach when working with

Northern Light Health
Government Relations
43 Whiting Hill Road
Brewer, Maine 04412

Office 207-861-3282
Fax 207-872-2030

Northern Light Health
Acadia Hospital
A.R. Gould Hospital
Beacon Health
Blue Hill Hospital
C.A. Dean Hospital
Eastern Maine Medical Center
Home Care & Hospice
Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

children and families. In our experience families want what is in the best interest of their children and fear can be overcome in an evidence based therapeutic care environment. Acadia Hospital is a safe place of nurturance, acceptance, and fosters self-esteem and wellness. Our treatment is youth centered, evidenced based, and rooted in the strengths of our young patients. While we honor the parents/guardians that we work with, and look to have as much input and participation, it is also imperative for the youth to feel that they are “in charge” of their treatment and wellness and we look to them to give as much consent as possible in our work together. Sexual orientation and gender identity are part of all of us, as much as the color of our eyes, the shape of our face or how tall we may grow as an adult.

It is also important to note that youth’s safety is of the upmost concern to our clinical staff. Any suspicions of abuse and neglect are immediately reported to DHHS as all our staff are trained on their roles as “mandated reporters” in our state.

On behalf of Northern Light Acadia Hospital, I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.