

Counseling Bans Harm Patients and Providers

The government should not ban citizens' right to seek professional help to cope with, reduce, or abstain from acting upon unwanted desires.

A man may seek counseling for help in abstaining from acting on his sexual desires in order to stay celibate for religious reasons; another man may seek counseling for help in reducing his desire to view pornography. A same-sex attracted individual has just as much right to seek professional help to cope with, reduce, or abstain from acting upon unwanted same-sex attractions. Likewise, a teen girl has just as much right to seek counseling to help her feel comfortable with her biological sex.

Governor Josh Shapiro is targeting the latter two to prohibit them from obtaining such counseling. Legislation has been introduced and Gov. Shapiro took executive action with state professional boards that will ban citizens' right to obtain such counseling and seek their own therapy goals, limit speech, hinder the ability of counselors and therapists to help their patients, and threaten to punish those with convictions on sexuality and gender that differ from the governor's.

Pennsylvanians who face unwanted same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria should be free to seek and obtain professional help in achieving their therapy goals.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *NIFLA v. Becerra* (2018), strongly suggested that counseling bans violate the constitutional rights of clients and their counselors.

The closing of the Tavistock gender clinic in England serves as a sobering cautionary tale, as almost 1,000 victims have come forward and are looking to sue the clinic for the harm and irreversible damage they suffered there as they were effectively denied any counseling that questioned their newfound gender identities. Instead of learning from these horrific mistakes, the Shapiro administration and some Democrat lawmakers doubled down on them while removing crucial options for those who are vulnerable.

KEY POINTS

- Individuals deserve the professional help they desire with those goals on an equal basis with any other person who seeks counseling to cope with or reduce unwanted feelings.
- The term "conversion therapy" is a misnomer. Such bans are really efforts to prevent people from voluntarily seeking the help of a counselor to address unwanted same-sex attraction, feelings, or behaviors.
- Such bans would also prevent people who struggle with gender dysphoria from obtaining professional help to assist them in feeling comfortable with their own biological sex.
- Child psychologists and therapists understand how children's identities take a long time to develop, and how children can change their minds. These proposals and laws would bar them from acting in the child's best interest.

Proponents of a ban claim that any attempt to change or reduce someone's gender dysphoria will result in a high risk of suicide. That is false. In fact, the opposite is true. A peer-reviewed study published in "Frontiers of Psychology" in February 2022 by Dr. Paul Sullins revealed that counseling reduced harm attributed to elevated stress, and suicidal behavior decreased for those who received such counseling compared to those who did not receive such counseling.

Using bait and switch tactics, those pushing for counseling bans complain about methods, but only ban end goals of therapy instead. For instance, counseling ban proponents often bring up methods like shock therapy. But their laws never prohibit any method of therapy. Instead, such bans only target the client's *goal* of therapy, no matter the method used, including talk therapy. The goal of those pushing counseling bans is not to end harmful practices, but to end people's ability to get professional help to cope with, reduce, or abstain from acting upon certain sexual desires. These bans attempt through law to steer children in particular exclusively towards cross-sex hormone injections and likely surgical amputation of healthy sex organs. This contributes to the growing number of people who deeply regret those surgical interventions and later seek reversal.

Supporting Freedom to Counsel

Pennsylvanians who wish to reduce their unwanted same-sex attractions or who want to feel comfortable in their bodies should be free to seek professional help. Mental health professionals (including pastors, teachers, mentors, counselors, and licensed therapists) must remain free to assist those seeking help with unwanted desires, behaviors, and feelings.

717-545-0600 • 23 N. Front St., Harrisburg, PA 17101



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