

DHP Conversion Therapy Workgroup

Friday, October 5, 2018

*Perimeter Center, 2nd Floor Conference Center, Board Room 2
Henrico, Virginia*

MEETING MINUTES

In Attendance:

Workgroup Convener

David E. Brown, DC
Director, Department of Health Professions

Workgroup Members

Jamie Clancey, LCSW
Member, Board of Social Work

Jay Douglas, MSM, RN, CSAC, FRE
Executive Director, Board of Nursing

Kevin Doyle, EdD, LPC, LSATP
Chairperson, Board of Counseling

William Harp, MD
Executive Director, Board of Medicine

Patrick A. Hope
Delegate, Virginia General Assembly

Jaime Hoyle
Executive Director, Boards of Counseling, Psychology and Social Work

Trula Minton
Member, Board of Nursing

Jennifer Morgan, PsyD

Kevin O'Connor, MD
President, Board of Medicine

Jennifer Phelps, BS, LPN, QMHPA
First Vice President, Board of Nursing

Jane Probst, LCSW

Herb Stewart, PhD
Chairperson, Board of Psychology

Terry Tinsley, PhD, LPC, LMFT, NCC, CSOTP
Member, Board of Counseling

Elaine Yeatts
Senior Policy Analyst, Department of Health Professions

Staff

Laura Z. Rothrock
Executive Assistant to Director David E. Brown, DC, Department of Health Professions

Opening Remarks and Approval of Agenda:

At 10:00am, prior to calling the meeting to order, Dr. Brown asked the workgroup members to take some time to review the documents that were not sent to them previously:

- Letter dated October 4, 2018 from Senator Scott Surovell re: Adding Conversion Therapy to the Standards of Practice; Unprofessional Conduct
- American Counseling Association (ACA) Resolution on Reparative Therapy/Conversion Therapy/Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) as a Significant and Serious Violation of the ACA Code of Ethics.
- Letter dated October 4, 2018 from Alliance Defending Freedom re: Proposed Regulation to Limit Counseling and Therapeutic Freedom

NOTE: Prior to the meeting, the workgroup had been provided with a letter dated October 1, 2018 from the National Task Force for Therapy Equality.

Dr. Brown called the meeting to order at 10:07am. He welcomed everyone, provided emergency egress information, and asked the workgroup members to introduce themselves. He also provided background of events leading to formation of the workgroup and what he hopes to accomplish during the meeting.

During the 2018 General Assembly session, Delegate Hope introduced HB 363 which would prohibit a person licensed by a health regulatory board from engaging in sexual orientation change efforts with a person under 18 years of age. During discussion before a subcommittee of the House, the question arose as to why licensing boards had not addressed this issue in regulation. Subsequently, Dr. Herb Stewart, President of the Board of Psychology, made the recommendation to Dr. Brown to convene a workgroup to discuss the issue. The workgroup will discuss the big picture and will not have authority to do anything but make a recommendation to the boards (i.e., Counseling, Medicine, Nursing, Psychology, and Social Work). Each board would have to make the decision whether to promulgate regulation. The process would take approximately 1½ to 2 years to go through all of the regulatory process steps, and there will be more than one opportunity for public comment during the process. Dr. Brown emphasized that this meeting is an initial step in the process.

Call for Public Comment:

Dr. Brown indicated that he will try to enforce a three minute time limit per speaker. Twenty-eight (28) people (24 signed-up plus and an additional 4 people) provided comment, including Senator Amanda Chase. Senator Chase spoke to the events during the 2018 General Assembly session where both the House and Senate (SB 245 - Surovell) bills were passed by indefinitely, indicated that regulations should conform to the actions of the General Assembly, and told the attendees that it was important to have a constructive and respectful conversion.

The comments from the public included personal experiences of how conversion therapy either helped the individual or did more harm (e.g., feelings of helplessness, fear and low-self-esteem) that took years of healing to overcome. One individual told the workgroup that no one should have to go through therapy because of therapy. One individual noted that as far back as 1973 the APA (American Psychiatric Association) indicated that homosexuality was not to be classified as a mental disorder.

Some comments expressed concerns about potential regulations in areas such as “fluidity,” freedom of speech of counselors, access to treatment, parental rights, minors’ rights to treatment, religious freedom rights, suicide/suicidal thoughts among LGBTQ youths. Other comments noted issues such as science versus morals, conversion therapy is not evidence-based treatment, and need for regulations to protect a vulnerable population.

Dr. Brown thanked Senator Chase for setting a respectful tone and thanked all of the speakers for coming forward with their comments. He indicated that some comments were outside the scope of the workgroup (e.g., legislative intent, constitutionality) and the boards would have legal counsel to advise them before moving forward. He also indicated that the need to regulate would not be determined by vote in the meeting but by consensus, if there was one.

Dr. Brown announced a 10 minute break before continuing. The meeting resumed at 11:49am.

Discussion of Public Comment and Agenda Packet Materials:

Dr. Brown asked the workgroup members to provide their thoughts on what they had heard from the public.

Delegate Hope thanked Dr. Brown for convening the workgroup and indicated he wanted to clarify three items: 1) In regards to the General Assembly, the committee votes do not represent the whole General Assembly because of the makeup of the committees. 2) He has brought a bill forward in each of the past 4 years. 3) The scope of the legislation is limited to children under 18 years of age and only deals with licensed professionals. He feels the government's role is to protect children and asked the workgroup to give the following questions thought: Do these therapies work? Do they cause harm? What does science/evidence suggest?

The workgroup members found the public comment to be compelling and emotional on both sides and indicated that youths and adults need therapies that are not harmful. Dr. Stewart put together the chart of policy and position statements in the agenda packet (pages 103 – 105) and asked for regulations to be considered. Dr. O'Connor felt that it is important to separate science from emotion. Dr. Doyle asked if the regulations currently offer adequate protection.

Several of the board representatives concurred with the need to regulate, as the mission of the boards is to protect the public; and they also reported that they do not recall receiving any complaints related to conversion therapy. Ms. Clancey felt that the public may need to be educated about filing complaints and suggested reevaluating accessibility to the public possibly through use of social media. Ms. Yeatts stated the expectation of getting complaints from a child/youth is unrealistic.

Dr. Tinsley brought up concern with the title "conversion" which could bring up issues and deflect from options parents have in seeking treatment. Other common terms were discussed by the workgroup: reparative therapy and Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE). Ms. Yeatts indicated that the legislation defines what conversion therapy is and is not and that the workgroup should look at the total definition.

Dr. Stewart discussed a recent Williams Institute Study based on a national survey which showed that more than 20,000 LGBT youths will receive conversion therapy from a licensed health care professional in 41 states that don't ban the practice. He asked that this information be included with the meeting materials.

Ms. Phelps spoke to the freedom of speech issue and indicated that conversion therapy is only one side of freedom of speech. Ethics practices say to put religious beliefs aside in professional practice. Other workgroup members indicated that conversion therapy may be done by non-licensed therapists.

Prior to breaking for lunch, Dr. Brown invited Senator Chase to make further comments. Senator Chase indicated the Senate committee did not advance the legislation, and no floor vote was taken. The workgroup heard from the public as to where conversion therapy went wrong, and she agrees that the general public needs a reporting mechanism for complaints. She indicated there could be unintended consequences to a regulatory ban on conversion therapy in that parents may not take their children to professionals for help. She feels that more options need to be allowed for children.

The workgroup broke for lunch at 12:38pm and resumed at 1:11pm.

Dr. Brown asked for any further comments from the workgroup on the need to regulate and the ability of conversion therapy to occur under current regulations. Discussion took place as to the fact that minors would not report complaints for themselves and concerning treatment plans, consent and a child's right to confidentiality.

There was not a complete consensus among the workgroup members. Most saw the need to regulate in regards to conversion therapy, but existing regulations may be adequate; and some felt there may be some negative connotations as to the term "conversion therapy."

Review of Potential Regulatory Language:

Dr. Brown asked Ms. Yeatts to review the regulatory language that she drafted (page 107 of the agenda packet). Ms. Yeatts indicated that the draft is identical to what is in the legislation on pages 1 and 3. She referred to lines 17 – 20 in both HB 363 and SB 245. Different terms were used (HB 363 used "sexual orientation change efforts," and SB 245 used "conversion therapy"), but the rest of the language is the same.

It was noted that licensees sometimes read things differently than intended, so whatever language is used should be clearly stated.

The draft language on page 107 has three parts: 1) the first sentence related to the practitioners specified in the regulation; 2) the definition of conversion therapy; and 3) what conversion therapy does not include.

Some felt that the term used (i.e., conversion therapy) is not important, but rather describe the behavior because practitioners could call it by a different name. The wording “this practice” or something similar could be used. Others felt that a label was needed, and it was pointed out that the media uses “conversion therapy.”

Another item of discussion in the draft was the word “seeks” on the third line. Patients have a right to explore, and the draft indicates in the third part that conversion therapy does not include identity exploration. Ms. Yeatts suggested using “that is aimed at changing” instead of “seeks to change.”

Dr. Brown indicated that Ms. Yeatts will work on the language that will be presented to the boards.

Closing Comments:

Dr. Brown discussed the next steps. There will be a report to the boards and interested stakeholders concerning the workgroup’s discussions with alternate proposed regulatory language. The boards can elect to promulgate regulations or not.

Delegate Hope thanked Dr. Brown for allowing him to be part of the process. He expressed his appreciation for everyone’s diligence and indicated there was discussion that was missing from previous discussions on the topic.

Dr. Brown informed the public that the boards will post agendas for upcoming meetings on their websites.

Adjourn:

With no further business to discuss, Dr. Brown adjourned the meeting at 2:09pm.