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California governor signs ban on reparative therapy for minors

by Monica Clark

Sacramento, California — California Gov. Jerry Brown has signed into law a bill banning so-called reparative or conversion therapy that attempts to change the sexual orientation of minors, making California the first state to outlaw the practice.

The California Catholic Conference and the Catholic Medical Association were among several groups opposing the ban.

On Monday, two days after Brown signed the ban into law, attorneys with the Pacific Justice Institute filed a court challenge seeking to keep the ban from taking effect Jan. 1. They claim the law intrudes on free speech, privacy, and freedom of religion and should be declared unconstitutional.

The new law bars psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health practitioners from engaging in efforts to change the sexual orientation of any patient or client under 18, regardless of the teen's willingness to undergo that therapy or the willingness of a parent, guardian or other person to authorize such efforts.

In a statement to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Brown said the bill "bans non-scientific 'therapies' that have driven young people to depression and suicide. These practices have no basis in science or medicine and they will now be relegated to the dustbin of quackery."

The California Catholic Conference, one of eight organizations on the legislation's official list of opponents, said the ban will "further erode parental rights in California by disallowing their choices for therapy for underage children."

The conference also objected because "there is not explicit exemption in the proposed legislation for clergy or licensed religious or spiritual counselors who engage in counseling individuals and juveniles on their sexual addictions and behaviors."

Other opponents included the American College of Pediatricians, the Pacific Justice Institute, and the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality.

Ban supporters say it provides needed protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth who can be harmed by reparative therapy.

The ban does not extend to psychotherapies that aim to provide acceptance, support and understanding of clients who are attracted to a person of the same sex or who are exploring sexual identity as long as there is no effort to change orientation or reduce or eliminate sexual or romantic attractions.

Joseph Nicolosi, a well-known proponent of reparative therapy, believes homosexuality is a form of arrested psychosexual development that can be repaired through various conditionings, including avoidance of contact with homosexuals, engaging in traditional male activities such as sports, increasing time spent with heterosexuals, and participating in group therapy.

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Christian transformational ministries propose the use of prayer, religious conversion, and individual and group counseling to change a homosexual's orientation.

Robert Spitzer, emeritus professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, recently issued a public apology for "making unproven claims of the efficacy of reparative therapy" in a 2001 study. He also apologized "to any gay person who wasted time and energy undergoing some form of reparative therapy because they believed that I had proven that reparative therapy works with some 'highly motivated' individuals."

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, almost 50,000 signatures in support of the ban were sent to Brown by the Human Rights Campaign, the country's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights organization.

The ban is also supported by Dignity USA, several chapters of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, and the California Psychological Association.

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