

MINUTES OF THE HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
October 8, 2018
East Conference Room

Present: Councilmembers Anderson, George, and Litten

Also Present: Councilmember O'Malley, Dr. Jason Lambrese of Cleveland Clinic Lakewood Family Health Center, Human Services Director Gelsomino, 3 members of the public, Law Director Butler

Call to Order: 6:00 p.m.

ORDINANCE NO. 41-18 - AN ORDINANCE amending Chapter 516, Discrimination Prohibited, of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Lakewood to prohibit any psychiatric treatment, including conversion therapy, which purpose is an attempt to change an individual's sexual orientation.

Director Gelsomino expressed support for the ordinance. She introduced Dr. Lambrese, a child psychiatrist from the Cleveland Clinic Lakewood Family Health Center to address conversion therapy from a medical and scientific perspective.

Dr. Lambrese briefly described his work treating youth. He stated that conversion therapy is shown to be harmful and that it can exacerbate underlying mental health conditions. LGBT youth are already at a higher risk for depression, anxiety, and mental health problems. He stated that there are ethical problems with conversion therapy because minors can't fully consent to it. Dr. Lambrese expressed support for the ordinance and remarked that it is in line with the recommendations of all major medical associations. He noted that five other Ohio cities have ordinances of this nature.

Councilmember Anderson stated that conversion therapy is pseudo-science and that he has never met another mental health professional who considers it a legitimate response to an underlying mental health problem. He questioned how any practitioner could claim to be competent in conversion therapy if there is no legitimate standard for its practice.

Councilmember George expressed her full support for the ordinance.

Councilmember O'Malley expressed that he introduced the ordinance to send a message to the community that we value our youth and because it is the right thing to do. After introducing it, he received numerous calls and emails from people who have had to undergo conversion therapy. He cited a study that found there were 75,000 U.S. minors in conversion therapy - approximately 25,000 being treated by a licensed therapist.

Councilmember O'Malley further stated that he is unaware of conversion therapy happening in Lakewood. However, he described a nationally known case of conversion therapy in Cincinnati that caused a transgender girl to kill herself.

The Committee discussed the problem of unlicensed counselors attempting to practice conversion therapy. The ordinance in its current state does not address this problem.

Director Butler explained how the ordinance calls on the Human Rights Commission to investigate complaints of conversion therapy being practiced

The committee discussed minor stylistic changes to the language of the ordinance.

A motion was made and seconded to remove “for a discriminatory reason,” and to add at the end of the new passage “a violation of this section shall be a discriminatory practice.”

All members voted in favor. Motion passed.

A motion was made and seconded to add the phrase “or cause another to engage” after “engage.”

All members voted in favor. Motion passed.

Members of the public expressed support and excitement that Lakewood will be the first Northeast Ohio community to pass such an ordinance.

The Committee further discussed the appropriate role of counseling and the fact that homosexuality is not a diagnosable mental health condition.

Dr. Lambrese described the LGBT services available and planned for the future at the Lakewood Family Health Center.

Councilmember Litten asked for Dr. Lambrese or another Cleveland Clinic representative to be present upon passage of the ordinance.

A motion was made and seconded to recommend Ordinance 41-18 as substituted.

All members voted in favor.

Motion passed.

Health & Human Services Committee adjourned at 6:42 p.m.