

## Virginia Board of Counseling

### Guidance Document on the Practice of Conversion Therapy

For the purposes of this guidance "conversion therapy" or "sexual orientation change efforts" is defined as any practice or treatment that seeks to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, including efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the any gender.

"Conversion therapy" does not include counseling that provides assistance to a person undergoing gender transition or counseling that provides acceptance, support, and understanding of a person or facilitates a person's coping, social support, and identity exploration and development, including sexual-orientation-neutral interventions to prevent or address unlawful conduct or unsafe sexual practices, as long as such counseling does not seek to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity in any direction.

In 18VAC115-20-130 of the *Regulations Governing the Practice of Counseling*, the Virginia Board of Counseling ("Board") has stated that: "The protection of the public health, safety, and welfare and the best interest of the public shall be the primary guide in determining the appropriate professional conduct of all persons whose activities are regulated by the board. Regardless of the delivery method, whether in person, by phone, or electronically, these standards shall apply to the practice of counseling."

One of the standards of practice established in regulation is that persons licensed, certified or registered by the Board shall:

*"Practice in a manner that is in the best interest of the public and does not endanger the public health, safety, or welfare"*

*See 18VAC115-20-130(B)(1) of the Regulations Governing the Practice of Counseling; 18VAC115-30-140(B)(1) of the Regulations Governing the Certification of Substance Abuse Counselors and Substance Abuse Counseling Assistants; 18VAC115-50-110(B)(1) of the Regulations Governing the Practice of Marriage and Family Therapy; and 18VAC15-60-130(B)(1) of the Regulations Governing the Practice of Licensed Substance Abuse Treatment Practitioners.*

Many national behavioral health and medical associations have issued position and policy statements regarding conversion therapy/sexual orientation change efforts, especially with minors. Such statements have typically noted that conversion therapy has not been shown to be effective or safe. The American Counseling Association (ACA) opposes conversion therapy because "it does not work, can cause harm, and violates our Code of Ethics. ACA will continue to support state legislation that bans this discredited practice."

The consensus opinion of the ACA Ethics Committee is that the basic goal of reparative/conversion therapy is to change an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. The ACA Ethics Committee states that counselors who conduct this type of

therapy view same-sex attractions and behaviors as abnormal and unnatural and, therefore, in need of "curing." The belief that same-sex attraction and behavior is abnormal and in need of treatment is in opposition to the position taken by national mental health organizations, including the ACA.

Consistent with the established position of the ACA, the Board considers "conversion therapy" or "sexual orientation change efforts" (as defined above) to be services that have the potential to harm patients or clients, especially minors. Thus, under regulations governing practitioners licensed, certified, or registered by the Board, practicing conversion therapy/sexual orientation change efforts with minors could result in a finding of misconduct and disciplinary action against the licensee, certificate holder, or registrant.