

After Exodus Closes, Anti-Gay Therapy Ban Bill Passes New Jersey House

The New Jersey Assembly voted on Monday to ban so-called conversion therapy, taking a step toward becoming the second U.S. state to prohibit licensed therapists from counseling gay and lesbian youths to change their sexual orientation.

The bill passed by a 56-14 vote, with seven abstentions, and it was expected to be adopted by the state Senate in a vote on Thursday.

Governor Chris Christie in March said he opposed the practice of conversion therapy, but on Monday his office declined to comment on whether he would sign or veto the bill.

If enacted, the measure would ban therapists or social workers from performing therapy that aims to change the sexual orientation of patients under age 18.

Currently, California is the only U.S. state to outlaw the practice. But, a federal appeals court has put that law's implementation on hold while it weighs the issue.

The New Jersey vote comes a week after Exodus International, a U.S. Christian group that once promoted conversion therapy, closed its doors. Operating since 1976, Exodus was affiliated with roughly 260 ministries across North America.

The New Jersey legislation would not ban conversion therapy by religious counselors.

The legislation cites American Psychiatric Association studies that found sexual orientation is determined at birth.

"The potential risks of reparative therapy are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior,

since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient,” the bill reads.

Opponents feel the law interferes with parental rights and is based on flawed research.

“There’s nothing that shows that talk therapy is harmful,” said John Tomicki of the League of American Families. He said he believes the legislation is unconstitutional and could even prevent some teenagers from talking about abuse by an adult.

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