

Florida County Now Censors Counseling for Minors for Gender Confusion

Liberty Counsel has filed suit in federal court against the City of Boca Raton and Palm Beach County for their adoption of City Ordinance 5407 and County Ordinance 2017-046, which prohibit minors in Boca Raton and Palm Beach County from receiving voluntary counseling from licensed professionals to reduce or eliminate their unwanted same-sex attractions, behaviors or gender confusion.

Liberty Counsel represents Dr. Robert Otto, LMFT, Dr. Julie Hamilton, LMFT, and their minor clients. These counselors provide life-saving counsel to minors who desperately desire to conform their attractions, behaviors and gender confusion to their sincerely held religious beliefs. The sacred trust between counselors and clients establishes a unique relationship that permits the clients to inform the counselors of their goals and receive counseling consistent with those goals.

However, Boca Raton and Palm Beach County are invading the office doors of mental health professionals, forcing themselves into the therapeutic alliance, and violating the critical privacy and fundamental rights of the counselors and the minor clients.

These ordinances violate the First Amendment by imposing a viewpoint and content-based prohibition on the speech of licensed professionals in the city and county who offer change counseling. The ordinances also blatantly violate the minors' rights under the Florida Patient's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, which permits counselors to offer and clients to receive treatment methods that they believe are in

the clients' best interest.

Moreover, the state of Florida is the only government body with authority to regulate mental health practitioners in the state, and local government bodies are not empowered to contradict state regulations. The state of Florida has rejected numerous proposals to ban change counseling in the state. Boca Raton and Palm Beach County have no authority to enact these unconstitutional bans.

"City Ordinances 5407 and County Ordinance 2017-046 are a gross intrusion into the fundamental rights of counselors and minors and represent government run amok," said Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel. "Boca Raton and Palm Beach County have no authority to prohibit a form of counseling simply because they do not like the religious beliefs of a particular client.

"The ordinances are unconstitutional and cause harm to countless minors in Boca Raton and Palm Beach County. Liberty Counsel will not stand by while an authoritarian council blatantly ignores the First Amendment." {eo}

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