

Gay Rights Trump Parental Rights in US Appeals Court

California's ban on a **controversial therapy** aimed at reversing homosexuality in children was upheld by a federal appeals court on Thursday that dismissed arguments by opponents of the measure who contended it violated **free speech** and **parental rights**.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling concluded that the so-called **gay-conversion therapy ban** does not violate the constitutional rights of counselors, minor patients or their parents.

"California has authority to prohibit licensed mental health providers from administering therapies that the legislature has deemed harmful," the ruling said.

The ruling by a three-judge panel resolved two lawsuits seeking to stop implementation of the measure, which prohibits therapists from performing sexual-orientation change counseling with children and teens under age 18.

Democratic Governor Jerry Brown signed the ban into law in September, making the nation's most populous state the first to prohibit the treatment, also known as reparative therapy, among youths. New Jersey Republican Governor Chris Christie signed a similar measure into law earlier this month.

The California ban marked a major victory for gay rights advocates, who say the treatment lacks a medical basis and can psychologically harm gay and lesbian youth.

Implementation of the law had been on hold pending the suits filed by Christian groups seeking to block it. The California Psychological Association and the California Board of Behavioral Sciences supported the ban.

A spokesman for state Attorney General Kamala Harris, who has defended the law, said she was not immediately available to comment. State Senator Ted Lieu of Torrance, the bill's author, applauded the decision.

"Today's federal court opinion puts another nail in the coffin for the discredited and harmful practice of gay-conversion therapy," he said in a statement. "Now the law has caught up to the truth: Sexual orientation is not a mental illness or defect."

Mat Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel, which had earlier obtained an injunction to block the law, issued a renewed criticism of the ban as politically motivated and "an astounding overreach by the state."

"Legislators and judges in the state of California have essentially barged into the private therapy rooms of victimized young people," Staver said in a statement.