

GUARDIAN

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Final vote expected at public hearing

Alachua County Commission poised to pass Conversion Therapy Ban Ordinance

The Alachua County Commission, convening at a General Policy Discussion special meeting, voted on February 5 to instruct the County Attorney to draft an amended ordinance for public hearing that would ban the practice of conversion therapy on minors by licensed practitioners.

The unanimous vote by the county commissioners included several changes to a draft ordinance. Some of the changes were intended to strengthen the ordinance against a court challenge, which currently is the case with a similar ordinance in Tampa.

“Conversion therapy” is counseling based on the erroneous assumption that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) identities are mental disorders that can be cured through various treatments. These discredited practices have long been rejected by the nation's leading medical and mental health organizations.

In 2015 the U.S. Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration concluded that “directing the child or adolescent to conform to any particular gender expression or identity, or directing parents and guardians to place pressure on the child or adolescent to conform to specific gender expressions and/or identities, is inappropriate and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes.”

The Human Rights Council of North Central Florida (HRCNCF) recognizes that the practice of conversion therapy, which is most often forced upon minors by their parents or guardians, is extremely harmful. The “treatment” frequently provokes guilt and anxiety. Moreover, it is not uncommon for the therapy to result in depression, self-destructive behavior and suicide.

“Licensed professionals that practice conversion therapy are posing serious harm to LGBTQ youth,” said HRCNCF President Bob Karp. “I am encouraged that our county commissioners understand the danger posed

Election Day is March 19

HRCNCF Queries Candidates for Gainesville Mayor and District 4 City Commissioner

The Human Rights Council of North Central Florida (HRCNCF) received responses to its candidate questionnaire from 5 out of the 6 candidates running for Gainesville Mayor and District 4 City Commissioner. (*Verbatim responses to the questionnaire are provided below.*)

“In their first terms in office, both Mayor Lauren Poe and Commissioner Adrian Hayes-Santos continue to be outspoken champions of LGBTQ rights,” said HRCNCF President Bob Karp.

Karp noted that Mayor Poe was from the start a steadfast supporter of the city's conversion therapy ban ordinance, which passed last year. Poe also spoke out against the Trump administration policies to prohibit transgender individuals to serve in the armed forces.

Along with Commissioner Helen Warren, Hayes-Santos took the lead in promoting the city's conversion therapy ban ordinance. Hayes-Santos faces challenger Robert Mounts, while Poe faces challengers Marlon Bruce, Jenn Powell and Jennifer Reid.

Of the candidates challenging the incumbents, only Jenn Powell has run for city commission before, when she lost her bid to unseat Helen Warren for the At-Large seat.

All candidates except for Reid submitted responses to the HRCNCF candidate questionnaire.

The March 19 ballot also includes a charter amendment question asking voters to approve the formation of a Charter Review Commission to propose changes to the city charter laws every ten years.

Early voting runs from March 9-16 at five voting sites, including at the UF J. Wayne Reitz Union.

by this practice, and they appear eager to move forward to ban it in Alachua County.”

A number of people spoke in favor of the ordinance, including Bruce Blackwell who described the practice as “child abuse”.

Last year the Gainesville City Commission voted unanimously to enact its own conversion therapy ban ordinance.

Three ways to vote:

All Gainesville registered voters can cast a ballot in the Mayor's race; Gainesville District 4 voters can also vote for their district commissioner.

Vote by Mail: Contact the Supervisor of Elections at 352-374-5252 or at www.VoteAlachua.com to have a ballot mailed to you.

Vote Early: Early voting runs from March 9-16 at the Supervisor of Elections office, 515 N. Main St., the Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43rd St., the Senior Recreation Center, 5701 NW 34th Blvd., the UF J. Wayne Reitz Union, and the M.L. King Jr. Center, 1028 NE 14th St.

Vote on Election Day: Vote in your own polling precinct from 7 AM to 7 PM on Tuesday, March 19.

Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have already enacted laws to prohibit licensed mental health providers from offering conversion therapy to minors. A similar bill has been stalled in the Florida Legislature for several years.

In Florida the municipalities of West Palm Beach, Lake Worth, Boynton Beach, Riviera Beach, Delray Beach, Wellington, Greenacres, Miami, Oakland Park, Wilton Manors, Miami Beach, Bay Harbor Islands, El Portal, Boca Raton, Key West, Gainesville and Tampa have also banned the practice. Broward and Palm Beach Counties have also passed conversion therapy bans.

At the February 5 special meeting of the Alachua County Commission, much of the discussion surrounded Tampa's ordinance which has been

challenged in federal court by the conservative Liberty Counsel, arguing that the ban violates First Amendment free speech rights.

Just last week a magistrate judge in that case issued a preliminary injunction, halting the enforcement of the portion of the conversion therapy ban that applies to "non-coercive" sexual orientation conversion efforts that are virtually just talking (i.e. talk therapy), but anything more than talking (for example, creating same-sex aversions through shock therapy) would still be banned.

The magistrate judge's opinion runs contrary to two other circuit court opinions that have upheld conversion therapy bans in California and New Jersey. The judge's position, which contradicts other decisions in those similar cases, implies that speech from medical professionals should fall under the same First Amendment protections as any other speech. Also, the Supreme Court has twice upheld California's 2012 ban on conversion therapy on minors.

The decision is expected to be appealed.

The Facts About “Conversion Therapy”

- “Conversion therapy” is counseling based on the erroneous assumption that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) identities are mental disorders that can be cured through treatment.
- These discredited practices have long been rejected by leading medical and mental health organizations.
- The practice of conversion therapy, which is most often forced upon minors by their parents or guardians, is extremely harmful. The “treatment” often provokes guilt and anxiety, and can result in depression, self-destructive behavior and suicide.
- Because licensed professionals engaged in conversion therapy are harming LGBTQ youth, HRCNCF believes Alachua County should enact an ordinance banning the practice on minors.
- In such an ordinance, the ban applies only to state-licensed therapists.

Nearly every major medical and psychological association in the country has come out in opposition to conversion therapy. These include the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American

Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American College of Physicians, the American Counseling Association, the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American School Health Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, the Pan American Health Organization, the Regional Office of the World Health Organization and the World Psychiatric Association.

Conversion therapy has also been rejected by the American Association of School Administrators, the

American Federation of Teachers, the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Education Association and the School Social Work Association of America.

One public hearing is required for the Alachua County Commission to pass the ordinance. HRCNCF urges its members to write a brief email to the County Commission in support of the ordinance at bocc@alachuacounty.us.

HRCNCF 2019 Gainesville City Commission & Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire Responses

All candidates, except for Jennifer Reid, submitted responses.

1. Last year the City Commission passed an ordinance which would prohibit state-licensed practitioners from carrying out the practice of “conversion therapy” for minors within the city of Gainesville. Conversion therapy is counseling based on the erroneous assumption that LGBTQ identities are mental disorders that can be cured through treatment. Do you support or oppose this ordinance?

Gainesville Mayor

MARLON BRUCE: I most definitely support this ban. In terms of one identity, I believe it is much more helpful to support the discovery than try to hinder it. We need to focus on the mental state of the youth more because in our modern day life has added a lot more stress to those of minors.

LAUREN POE: I fully support the ordinance and am proud to have made this referral to the commission while still serving as a city commissioner.

JENN POWELL: I support this.

Gainesville City Commission District 4

ADRIAN HAYES-SANTOS: Strongly support! I'm proud to have voted for this ordinance while on the commission and to have worked with the HRCNCF to get this ordinance passed.

ROBERT MOUNTS: I strongly support this ordinance and at the recent Democratic Executive Committee meeting in January, moved to adopt a resolution opposing it as a “no-brainer”. The motion offered by my friend, Terry Fleming, passed unanimously.

2. Do you support annual city proclamations recognizing Gainesville’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Pride Days?

Gainesville Mayor

MARLON BRUCE: There is no reason why every special day should not be recognized! We live in a society where it is increasingly becoming easier to come out as a LGBTQ+ lets not stand in the way!

LAUREN POE: Yes, and it has been my honor as mayor to present these proclamations on behalf of our community.

JENN POWELL: I do.

Gainesville City Commission District 4

ADRIAN HAYES-SANTOS: Yes! I think it's important that we celebrate the diversity in our community.

ROBERT MOUNTS: Yes, without reservation.

3. The Florida Competitive Workforce Act seeks to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity statewide in employment, housing and public accommodations. Would you support a city of Gainesville resolution that would urge the Florida Legislature to pass this bill?

Gainesville Mayor

MARLON BRUCE: It is my strongest belief that one should earn their living by the sweat of their brow. If

someone wishes to work and is able to perform the duties then we as a community must allow them to contribute to the common good. As a city we must stand in solidarity with those who need us the most, and encourage this on a state and federal level as well.

LAUREN POE: Absolutely.

JENN POWELL: Yes I would.

Gainesville City Commission District 4

ADRIAN HAYES-SANTOS: Yes! I would like to work with the HRCNCF to craft a resolution to support the bill.

ROBERT MOUNTS: Yes, without reservation.

4. In 2016, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a rule as part of the Affordable Care Act that prohibits discrimination in health programs and activities that receive funding from HHS. Prior to the implementation of this rule most individual and group health plans excluded coverage for gender transition services. After January 1, 2017, fully insured individual and group policies that receive funding from HHS will include coverage for gender transition services. This rule applies differently to large employer plans that are “self-funded”. A self-funded plan is one where the employer assumes the health plan liability and risk in exchange for more control over the plan’s administration and funding levels. The city of Gainesville is a self-funded entity. Do you support the city of Gainesville including coverage for gender transition services for their employees?

Gainesville Mayor

MARLON BRUCE: I support everyone's right to determine who they are; it is the foundation of our republic that all citizens can engage in the pursuit of happiness with hinderance to none. With this being said, I believe that unless it is paramount to the health and well-being of city employees, we should focus on funding what we currently provide.

LAUREN POE: Absolutely.

JENN POWELL: Yes.

Gainesville City Commission District 4

ADRIAN HAYES-SANTOS: Yes! I believe the city of Gainesville should cover gender transition services.

ROBERT MOUNTS: Yes.

5. Describe some efforts you have taken locally to support or advocate for LGBTQ rights.

Gainesville Mayor

MARLON BRUCE: I simply work on helping younger people come to grips with their sexuality and how to deal with the stigma by relating my own experiences as a bi-sexual man.

LAUREN POE: I helped defend the inclusion of gender identity into the city's non-discrimination

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THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2019, AT 7:00 PM AT PRIDE COMMUNITY CENTER OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA, 3131 NW 13TH ST, GAINESVILLE

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ordinance, a very difficult public fight at the time. I also have spoken at many LGBTQ events, including the Pride Fest and Transgender Day of Remembrance.

JENN POWELL: I've volunteered at the annual Pride Festival every year since becoming active in politics in 2015. I've marched and tried to be an ally whenever possible.

Gainesville City Commission District 4

ADRIAN HAYES-SANTOS: The major issue concerning LGBTQ rights in our community while I've been on the commission has been the destructive practice of conversion therapy. I'm proud to have to not only voted for the city ordinance to ban youth conversion therapy in Gainesville, but to have worked with the HRCNCF to get the ordinance passed. I am dedicated to ensuring that everyone in our community is treated equally in our community. I look forward to working with the HRCNCF to pass LGBTQ protections in the future and to continue to celebrate the diversity in our community.

ROBERT MOUNTS: I have supported efforts of my parish church, Holy Trinity Church of Gainesville, to implement long-sought rule changes permitting same-sex marriage in our church and signed a petition asking the Presiding Bishop (Howard) to change his stance on this issue. See also answer to Question 1.