

## **Wisconsin Republicans embrace harmful conversion “therapy” practices**

By: State Senator Melissa Agard, Senate Democratic Leader

Widely discredited by the medical and scientific community, so-called “conversion therapy” is a dangerous practice that targets LGBTQ youth and seeks to change their sexual or gender identities using psychological or spiritual interventions. Medical professionals are in consensus that conversion therapy is harmful, ineffective and should not be part of any behavioral health treatment of children and adolescents.

Due to its detrimental impacts, twenty states, including the District of Columbia, and numerous local units of government throughout Wisconsin have taken action to prohibit the practice. Unfortunately, this dangerous, discriminatory, and pseudoscientific “therapy” is currently allowed in Wisconsin.

Less than two weeks into the start of a new legislative session, Wisconsin Republicans have already demonized those who lead lifestyles different than theirs and neglected their duty to act in the best interests of the people of our state, including our LGBTQ youth.

The State Legislature had the opportunity to end this conversion therapy in our state and protect the physical and mental well-being of LGBTQ youth. Unfortunately, against recommendations of medical experts and psychological professionals, Legislative Republicans suspended a rule that would have finally disallowed this destructive practice.

The Trevor Project, an American nonprofit organization founded in 1998 focusing on suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth, estimate that there are over 1.8 million LGBTQ youth in the United States that seriously consider suicide each year, including 29,000 Wisconsin youth. We know that our LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers, but we also know that just one accepting adult decreases that risk significantly.

To clarify, LGBTQ youth are not inherently subject to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society.

All kids deserve to feel safe, loved, and know that they belong, no matter their identity. To our LGBTQ youth, I see you, I honor you, and I will never stop fighting for your right to live with equal rights and without fear of violence. Governor Evers, my Democratic colleagues, and I will continue to be your advocate and partner in the State Legislature. We will not stop until conversion therapy, which is essentially state-sponsored child abuse, is prohibited and your liberties are respected.