**SAMPLE LETTER / TALKING POINTS – pick and choose to craft your letter.**

* **Include personal stories!**
* **Be sure to include your home address, especially if you are in a key district (see committee membership list).**
* **If you live in Madison or Milwaukee, but have other connections to their districts (such as a statewide organization), mention that connection to the relevant district.**

**LETTER TEMPLATE**

Date

Name and address of recipient

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on the Review of Administrative Rules:

I am writing to strongly urge you to approve Clearinghouse Rule 19-166. This rule updates and modernizes the Conduct Code for marriage and family therapists, professional counselors and social workers.

[INSERT PERSONAL STORY – Why do you care about this issue?]

[INSERT SOME FACTS FROM BELOW to back up your personal story, or explain more about your experience and/or knowledge]

[Mention any connections you might have to the recipient of the letter. Do you live or work or own a business in their district? Any compelling connection to the recipient? If you don’t have anything here that’s ok.]

Closing, your name, and be sure to include your address, etc.

**URGE SUPPORT**

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on the Review of Administrative Rules:

I am writing to strongly urge you to approve Clearinghouse Rule 19-166. This rule updates and modernizes the Conduct Code for marriage and family therapists, professional counselors and social workers. This Conduct Code was developed in the early 1990’s when Google, tele-mental health and social media did not exist. Any professional Conduct Code needs to be reviewed and revised periodically as society changes and new ethical issues present themselves.

The statewide Coalition to Ban Conversion Therapy urges the Joint Committee on the Review of Administrative Rules to vote to support Clearinghouse Rule 19-166, which includes a ban on the practice of “conversion therapy” in the professional code of conduct for social workers, marriage and family therapists and professional counselors.

Clearinghouse Rule 19-166, including its ban on Conversion Therapy, was unanimously passed by the Examining Board of Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling and Social Work in January of 2020 after a two-year review process that began in early 2018.

**DESCRIBE HARMS OF CONVERSION THERAPY**

[Conversion therapy](https://www.aacap.org/aacap/policy_statements/2018/Conversion_Therapy.aspx), also known as “reparative therapy,” is the dangerous practice of attempting to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Conversion therapy methods may include aversion therapy, talk therapy, shaming, hypnosis, or other techniques.

Few practices hurt LGBTQ youth more than attempts to change their sexual orientation or gender identity through conversion therapy, and evidence shows it causes numerous serious mental health issues, including suicidality. Furthermore, conversion therapy has been condemned by every major medical organization in the country, and in 2015 the [U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration concluded that such interventions are “coercive, can be harmful, and should not be part of behavioral health treatment.”](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Ending-Conversion-Therapy-Supporting-and-Affirming-LGBTQ-Youth/SMA15-4928)

Conversion/reparative therapy or sexual orientation change efforts are based on the false belief that being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is a sickness or disorder requiring treatment or a “cure.” Sexual orientation and gender identity are not mental disorders or diseases. There is no scientific evidence that sexual orientation change efforts are effective in “curing” someone of being LGBTQ.

[The American Psychological Association’s Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation](https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf) concluded that sexual orientation change efforts can pose critical health risks to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, including confusion, depression, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, shame, social withdrawal, suicidality, substance abuse, stress, disappointment, self-blame, decreased self-esteem and authenticity to others, increased self-hatred, hostility and blame toward parents, feelings of anger and betrayal, loss of friends and potential romantic partners, problems in sexual and emotional intimacy, sexual dysfunction, high-risk sexual behaviors, a feeling of being dehumanized and untrue to self, a loss of faith, and a sense of having wasted time and resources.

Young people who experience high levels of family rejection face serious health risks, including 8.5 times more likely to report having attempted suicide and 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression. Research shows that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide as their straight peers. Nearly half of young transgender people have thought about taking their own lives and one quarter report they have made a suicide attempt.

At a time that Wisconsin is suffering from a suicide rate higher than the national average, why would we want to support and encourage a practice that makes it more likely that children who identify as LGBTQ could commit suicide?

**SCOPE OF PROBLEM**

Conversion/reparative therapy has been banned in twenty states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. In addition, ten Wisconsin cities have banned Conversion therapy including: Milwaukee, Madison, Racine, Cudahy, Shorewood, Eau Claire, Sheboygan, Superior, Glendale and Appleton.

You may wonder if “conversion therapy” is happening in Wisconsin. There are currently fifteen licensed mental health professionals in our state who are on the clinical network for the national group, Focus on the Family. Focus on the Family actively promotes and supports Conversion Therapy. One of these fifteen practitioners actually lists one of his specialties as “homosexual issues.” This practice often “flies under the radar” because of its lack of efficacy, and increasing recognition of the harm it causes, but we know that it is taking place in Wisconsin.