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Wellington bans ‘conversion therapy’; mayor is lone vote against



- [Matt Morgan](#)

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Wellington is the latest to join the growing list of Palm Beach County cities that have banned conversion therapy for minors, but it wasn't unanimous — a first for a municipality in the county.

The Village Council voted 4-1 on first reading Tuesday night to ban the practice that many mainstream health organizations have deemed harmful. [Mayor Anne Gerwig](#) was the lone vote against the ban.

Gerwig said she recognizes homosexuality is not a mental disorder or something to be ashamed of, but she said she thinks young people should have the option to choose.

“I think they should have that right, and that's what I struggle with here,” she said.

Council Michael Drahos said there may be a gray area between “conversion therapy” for LGBTQ people and “therapy” to talk about their sexuality and how to address their feelings. But he voted in favor of the blanket ban because he wants his thoughts to be clear on conversion therapy.

“Under no scenario would I ever support conversion therapy, regardless of the arguments made,” he said. “I just find it to be archaic and personally offensive.”

West Palm Beach, Lake Worth, Delray Beach, Boynton Beach and Riviera Beach all banned the practice with unanimous votes.

Two doctors also presented against the ban of conversion therapy.

David Pickup, a licensed marriage and family therapist, said the therapy would be especially important for minors who have been sexually abused by a pedophile of the same sex. Pickup said he was sexually abused at a young age and started to feel homosexual feelings.

His therapy doesn't involve any electroshocks or "praying away the gay," he said.

"A ban on therapy for unwanted homosexual feelings or gender dysphoria would be, in fact, child abuse," he told the council.

But no studies have shown that a person can become gay because they were abused, said Rachel Needle, a licensed psychologist who practices in West Palm Beach. People are born either gay or straight, and it's impossible to "convert" them, she said.

Conversion therapy often leads to guilt, anxiety and depression, she added.

"Many LGTBQ youth in our society still grow up believing that there is something wrong with them," Needle said. "Passage of this ordinance will send a powerful message to LGBTQ youth in this city: 'there's nothing wrong with you, your sexual orientation or your gender identity.' "

Public speakers at the meeting were largely split on the issue, but the council wanted to take politics out of it and do what it thought was right.

"I think this is not something that should be rooted in religion or the right or the left, it's about the safety and well-being of minors," Councilwoman Tanya Siskind said.

The ordinance requires a second vote at the June 27 meeting.