

# GUARDIAN

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Two public hearings still required to pass ordinance

## Gainesville City Commission gives initial OK to “Conversion Therapy” Ban Ordinance

The Gainesville City Commission, sitting as the General Policy Committee, voted unanimously on December 14 to instruct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance that would ban the practice of conversion therapy on minors by licensed practitioners.

To be enacted, the City Commission must approve the proposed ordinance at two public hearings.

“Conversion therapy” (also known as “reparative therapy”) is counseling based on the erroneous assumption that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) identities are mental disorders that can be cured through aversion treatment. These discredited practices have long been rejected by our 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.” *(continued on next page)*



As part of Pride Days, HRCNCF President Bob Karp leads a panel discussion on conversion therapy.

### HRCNCF Queries Gainesville City Commission Candidates for March 20 Election

The Human Rights Council of North Central Florida (HRCNCF) received responses to its Gainesville City Commission candidate questionnaire.

Four of the five candidates submitted responses: Harvey Budd and Gail Johnson for the At-Large seat, and Tyra “Loudd” Edwards and Gigi Simmons for the District 1 seat. Incumbent District 1 Commissioner Charles Goston did not provide responses. *(Verbatim responses to the questionnaire are provided below.)*

“All four candidates who responded to the questionnaire provided good and well-informed responses to a variety of LGBTQ issues,” said HRCNCF President Bob Karp.

Karp noted that in the At-Large race, incumbent Commissioner Harvey Budd has had a long history of supporting LGBTQ issues, and on December 14 at the General Policy Committee he voted to instruct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance to ban conversion therapy for minors. (District 1 Commissioner Charles Goston was not present for the vote.)

Gainesville elections are nonpartisan so all registered voters can vote for the At-Large seat, while only voters in District 1 can also vote for their district commissioner. If no candidate garners more than 50% of the vote in the District 1 race, then the top two vote-getters will appear on the May 1 runoff ballot.

Early voting runs from March 10-17 at the Supervisor of Elections office, 515 N. Main St., Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43<sup>rd</sup> St., and Cone Park Library, 2801 E. University Ave.

You can also call 352-374-5252 to have a ballot mailed to you, or you can vote on Election Day, March 20, from 7 AM to 7 PM in your polling precinct.

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. “It’s time for both the City of Gainesville and Alachua County to enact ordinances banning the practice.”

On October 19, as part of Gainesville Pride Days, HRCNCF hosted a panel discussion about the effects of conversion therapy. The panel included local psychologists and mental health practitioners, two local ministers, and a survivor of conversion therapy.

Karp said the panel discussion brought to light a long-discredited and harmful practice that still endures in Gainesville and Alachua County.

Ten 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.

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

In each of the above-mentioned jurisdictions which have enacted conversion therapy bans, the ban applies only to state-licensed therapists. Unlicensed ones, such as those associated with faith-based groups, retain their religious freedom to engage in such work. Additionally, adults remain free to seek out such therapy.

According to an Orlando Political Observer-Gravis Marketing poll of 1,243 Florida voters conducted in April 2017, 71% think conversion therapy should be illegal for minors, 18% were uncertain and only 11% thought conversion therapy should be legal. (The poll has a margin of error of 2.8%.)

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.

## 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” frequently 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 and the City of Gainesville should enact an ordinance banning the practice on minors.
- In such an ordinance, the ban applies only to state-licensed therapists. Unlicensed ones, such as those associated with faith-based groups, retain their religious freedom to engage in such work.

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.

Two public hearings are required for the City Commission to pass the ordinance. HRCNCF urges its members to write a brief email to the City Commission in support of the ordinance at [citycomm@cityofgainesville.org](mailto:citycomm@cityofgainesville.org).

# HRCNCF 2018 Gainesville City Commission Candidate Questionnaire Responses

- 1. Do you support 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. This ordinance would not outlaw the practice among non-licensed persons, such as those associated with faith-based organizations, nor would it prevent adults from seeking such therapy.**

## Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 1

HARVEY BUDD: I fully support an ordinance banning conversion therapy for minors. Gainesville should join the 17 other municipalities in Florida – including Tampa, Miami, West Palm Beach, Boynton Beach, Lake Worth, Key West, and Tampa – that recently passed similar ordinances. I believe that Gainesville taking this step will also encourage our Alachua County Commissioners to pass a countywide ban, as Palm Beach County did in December. We must take this action on the local level because we cannot wait for the Republican-dominated Florida legislature to pass a statewide ban.

GAIL JOHNSON: Absolutely. Conversion therapy is a practice that should be prohibited state-wide. Gainesville needs to be on the front line of prohibiting the practice. Minors should have control over the therapy they receive and it should be illegal for parents or guardians to force an ineffective and offensive therapy on minors because of how they identify.

## Gainesville City Commission District 1

TYRA “LOUDD” EDWARDS: I do support the ordinance that would prohibit state-licensed practitioners from carrying out the practice of “conversion therapy” for minors within the city of Gainesville. People who are exposed to sexual orientation change efforts are exposed to all sorts of mental trauma. We must protect and respect our youth's growth, and make sure they grow into healthy adults.

GIGI SIMMONS: Yes, I would support an ordinance that would prohibit state-licensed practitioners from carrying out the practice of “conversion therapy” for minors within the city of Gainesville. I believe only consenting adults should be able to make this choice for therapy if they choose. However, minors and non-consenting adults should not be subjected to such treatment.

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

## Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 1

HARVEY BUDD: Absolutely. The annual proclamation is the least we can do as a city to stand up for unity, acceptance, and diversity. I also continue to attend the Annual Pride Awards Dinner, the Pride Parade, and the Pride Fest.

GAIL JOHNSON: Of course there should be city-wide support for Pride Day recognition. City proclamations allow for celebration and help strengthen the LGBTQ+ communities. It allows individuals who may feel afraid of coming out to find support, celebration, and guidance on the journey of telling the world who they are.

## Gainesville City Commission District 1

TYRA “LOUDD” EDWARDS: Yes, I do. Being African American and understanding how important it is to celebrate not only who you are, but how you transcend through discrimination, violence, and being dehumanized. LGBTQ should be celebrated. There should be a month of pride in their honor.

GIGI SIMMONS: YES!!!

- 3. The Florida Competitive Workforce Act (HB 347 and SB 66) 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 City Commission At-Large Seat 1

HARVEY BUDD: Yes, and I also believe it is our duty as citizens to demand that our local legislators support the statewide prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. For 10 years, the Florida Competitive Workforce Act has been introduced to the Florida House and Senate, and the powers that be have killed it in committee. Its passage is long overdue. It is shameful that a concept as simple and straightforward as equal protection under the law is not a priority for our state's decision makers.

GAIL JOHNSON: Yes, Gainesville should be a large proponent of a bill that prohibits discrimination and we should absolutely call on the legislature as a city to pass this needed protection. Gainesville is on the forefront of inclusive cities, but that is not true in many areas of Florida. Gainesville has a responsibility to confront and diminish discrimination in every field possible.

Gainesville City Commission District 1

TYRA “LOUDD” EDWARDS: I support equality for LBGQTQ. Refusing to see this reality only serves to unjustly put up with bigotry, support oppression, and distract us from defending the rights of all our fellow human beings.

GIGI SIMMONS: Yes, I believe no one should be discriminated against regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

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 City Commission At-Large Seat 1

HARVEY BUDD: Yes. It is up to us as a City to be a role model and to lead by example on social justice issues, including offering progressive health care plans to our employees. During my first term as Commissioner, I worked with City staff to obtain prescription coverage for an employee going through the transition process.

GAIL JOHNSON: Yes, employees of the city of Gainesville should have access to gender transition services. By removing that option, the city would be placing the burden of cost and access on the individual alone. This is necessary healthcare for the LBGQTQ+ community and should be covered until all circumstances.

Gainesville City Commission District 1

TYRA “LOUDD” EDWARDS: Yes I do. Transgender people need care that affirms their true selves and promotes their health and well-being.

GIGI SIMMONS: Yes, I support the coverage of gender transition services. An employee's health and well-being should not be compromised based on ones' gender identity.

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

Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 1

HARVEY BUDD: A. For many years, I have been an active member of Equality Florida. B. I long supported the Pride Center and attend many of their events. C. Through my wife's television show, the Ilene Silverman Show, we produced an episode featuring P-FLAG in order to educate the community about LBGQTQ minors and the need for their families to accept and love them. D. Almost 28 years ago, Mark Spangler and I opened up the University Club as a gay bar. This provided a much-needed venue for the LBGQTQ community, and we are proud of what we accomplished over the years. I also assisted Mark Strickland with acquiring the Melody Club.

GAIL JOHNSON: As a candidate, one of the first events I attended was the Pride March in October. When I moved to Gainesville, I specifically chose a church that was inclusive of the LBGQTQ+ community because I knew I could never raise my daughter in a church that believed that communities should be excluded.

Gainesville City Commission District 1

TYRA “LOUDD” EDWARDS: I am running for office. I believe as an elected official that I could assist in doing a lot of good for the LBGQTQ community.

GIGI SIMMONS: My support and advocacy for LBGQTQ rights have been personal and intimate with my friends and loved ones whom identify as LBGQTQ. I desperately want my friends and members of LBGQTQ community to feel welcomed and supportive by the Gainesville Community.

**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA, INC.**

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THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS  
THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018, AT 7:00 PM AT PRIDE  
COMMUNITY CENTER OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA,  
3131 NW 13<sup>TH</sup> ST, GAINESVILLE

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