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**Written Testimony  
Comptroller Kevin Lembo  
March 7, 2017**

**Concerning  
H.B. 6695 AAC the Protection of Youth from Conversion Therapy**

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Srinivasan, and Members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for raising this legislation and for the opportunity to express strong support for eliminating the traumatic practice of conversion therapy for minors in our state.

Conversion therapy is a dangerous practice that seeks to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. It has been discredited by the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Association of Social Workers, among other leading professional organizations.

The fact that such legislation is a necessity – and it is – is deeply troubling to me. As the first gay person elected to statewide office in Connecticut, I'm grateful that Connecticut has been a leader in protecting the rights of LGBTQ individuals and families, and that the promotion of conversion therapy is a rarity here. However, it remains a threat.

I very clearly remember the rejection that I personally experienced when I was 11 years old and came out to my family for the first time. I cannot imagine any child, in addition to this rejection, having to endure the added trauma and abuse of so-called "conversion therapy."

The legislative language of this bill should make an important distinction – that the term "conversion therapy" does not apply to counseling services that seek to support a person's decision to undergo gender transition or support a person's sexual identity exploration and development.

There is very little research on LGBTQ minors who have experienced conversion therapy because survivors are shamed and sometimes fear for their lives when reporting such information. Many of these youth were forced into the practice by a family that has rejected them. Youth that have experienced such rejection are 8 times more likely to report having attempted suicide than their non-LGBTQ peers who have not experienced family rejection. In

fact, LGBTQ youth, regardless of exposure to conversion therapy, are already 4 times more likely to commit suicide than non-LGBTQ youth.

According to the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the long-term negative effects of experiencing conversion therapy can include suicide attempts, depression, HIV infection, dropping out of school and substance abuse.

Although conversion therapy is not as common a practice in Connecticut as it is in other states, there have still been cases within our state and there are several organizations that still support these types of services through the [couragec.org](http://couragec.org) website. This legislation aims to entirely eliminate this practice and protect minors in our state.

Six states have banned the practice with similar language, while six more states are considering legislation this session along with Connecticut. The laws have already been challenged in the courts and have been found constitutional. Furthermore, prominent federal officials, including Vice President Mike Pence, are on record as previously advocating for “strengthening the American Family” by taking steps that include opposing equal legal status for gay and lesbian relationships, while expressing support for directing resources “toward those institutions which provide assistance to those seeking to change their sexual behavior.” Now is an important time for Connecticut to step up and protect one of its most vulnerable populations.

I strongly urge your support.

Thank you for your time.