



35 Ohio LGBTQ+ organizations are calling for Spectrum News to take down a recently published story that pits the lived experience of a Black transgender community member against a conversion therapy program in Virginia.

Local mental health agency, The Buckeye Ranch, was approached in May 2021 for an interview focused on the mental health damage done by the uptick in anti-trans legislation. The story, however, shifted to focus on so-called conversion therapy, ultimately providing a platform for this discredited practice, describing it with the harmful misnomer "reparative therapy." The story failed to include the practitioner's lack of credentials as a therapist and his [long history](#) of anti-LGBTQ+ advocacy. This shift in focus was not communicated to the subject of the interview or to The Buckeye Ranch. The resulting story validated the harmful practice and a disgraced practitioner against a transgender individual's lived experience.

After multiple requests from The Buckeye Ranch and the interview subject for the story to be taken down, as well as a meeting in August between Spectrum, The Buckeye Ranch, and GLAAD—a national LGBTQ+ media advocacy organization—to communicate the harm being done by the story, Spectrum has asserted the story will not be taken down due to company policy, despite the very real and dangerous consequences of this storytelling.

"The news media has a responsibility to report on LGBTQ+ people accurately and respectfully, especially LGBTQ+ youth, whose very lives are at risk," said Barbara Simon, Head of News and Campaigns at GLAAD. "Medical professionals have long discredited the practice of trying to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity as ineffective and harmful. This is not an issue where journalists need to seek 'both sides' and amplify a dangerous practice and practitioner - especially without noting their anti-LGBTQ+ record. Journalists and outlets must listen to members of the community they serve when they raise concerns about reporting. Outlets can and should remove content like this and adhere to the highest principle of public safety."

September was Suicide Awareness Month and The Buckeye Ranch has voiced the devastating impact of conversion therapy and the very real consequences of unaffirming spaces and relationships for LGBTQ+ youth, which include disproportionate rates of suicide.

"As mental health professionals, we cannot stress enough the harm done by providing a platform to a practice that has been widely denounced by the mental health community and costs LGBTQ+ folks their lives," said Kathryn Stephens, EVP of Marketing and Development at The Buckeye Ranch. "Conversion therapy does irreparable damage, often leading to suicide, and providing a platform to it under the guise of another name is irresponsible. Our concern is the safety of our children, youth, and families and particularly for our community members' well being and dignity."

Other organizations share the concern for the repercussions of providing this platform.

"PFLAG understands that reparative or conversion 'therapies,' which emerged from the discredited view that same-sex attraction is a mental disorder and that gender nonconforming behaviors can be 'corrected' are demonstrably harmful to the mental health of people who undergo this discredited

practice, and often result in increased rates of depression, anxiety and self-harming behaviors,” said Jaron Terry, president of PFLAG Columbus. “Particularly vulnerable to these negative outcomes are children and adolescents. Reparative or conversion ‘therapies’ have been rejected by all major health organizations including the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association and the American Medical Association. PFLAG advocates for LGBTQ+ persons and leads with love in educating and supporting parents of LGBTQ+ youth to understand that their children of all ages, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions should be loved, affirmed, and celebrated. As parents, that is what we are called to do,” Terry added.

Siobhan Boyd-Nelson, Director of Development and External Relations for Equality Ohio, echoed these concerns.

“Equality Ohio knows that the discredited and scientifically baseless practice known as ‘conversion therapy’ is a dangerous form of psychological abuse from which every child should be protected,” said Boyd-Nelson. “Any outlet which provides a forum for rebranding this practice as anything but the pseudo-science that it is, is contributing to an unsafe and unwelcoming environment for all of Ohio’s youth.”

This coverage not only dishonors an LGBTQ+ individual’s vulnerability in sharing his story but provides a platform to this dangerous practice.

We are calling as a collective for this story to be taken down to prevent further harm, specifically to the vulnerable LGBTQ+ youth in our community.

Signed:

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