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National Orgs Target "Conversion Therapy" Quacks with Historic Federal Consumer Fraud Complaint

By Liz Halloran

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Today, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) filed a [federal consumer fraud complaint](#) against People Can Change, an organization that preys on vulnerable LGBT people and families by using damaging and discredited claims that it can change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.



complaint filed with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the agency charged with protecting America's consumers, the groups lay out the junk pseudoscience that Virginia-

based People Can Change (PCC) uses to expose the American people to ineffective and dangerous "conversion therapy" practices that have for decades been linked to serious harm, including depression, substance abuse, and even suicide.

The organizations are asking the FTC to take enforcement action to stop PCC's deceptive practices and investigate all practitioners making similar claims.

The complaint alleges that PCC's advertisements and business practices, which expressly and implicitly claim that they can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, constitute deceptive, false, and misleading practices and can cause serious harm to consumers, all in direct violation of [Section 5 of the FTC Act](#).

The complaint also alleges that, in violation of FTC guidelines, PCC, like other practitioners in the "conversion therapy" industry:

- Defrauds consumers into believing that being LGBT is a mental illness or emotional defect that needs to be cured, a false claim rejected for decades by the American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, multiple United Nations committees, and every other major medical and mental health organization in the country;
- Falsely claims that its "services" have a basis in science, and fails to disclose that its practices can lead to depression, substance abuse, decreased self-esteem, and self-harm, including suicide;
- Targets and exploits highly vulnerable groups, including LGBT youth, who already experience bias and rejection at alarming rates in society and their own homes;
- And uses unsubstantiated testimonials, endorsements, and scientific claims to justify charging hundreds and thousands of dollars to give vulnerable individuals false hope that their core identity is something to be cured.

"Conversion therapy is abusive, harmful to children, and we urge the FTC to join our call to ban its practice once and for all. This is dangerous junk science that uses fear and shame to tell young people the only way to find love and acceptance is by changing the very nature of who they are," said HRC President Chad Griffin.

"Today, after decades of advocacy, the voices of conversion therapy survivors have carried

all the way up to the highest levels of government. This historic complaint is not only the first clear opportunity the Obama Administration has had to end these deadly practices for good, but, if investigated fully, could very well be the final nail in the coffin of the entire conversion therapy industry. We sincerely look forward to working with the Federal Trade Commission to investigate this fraudulent and unethical organization – along with every trusted professional who profits from the anguish of LGBTQ youth and their families. But, even more so, we look forward to the day when every human being, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity, knows they were born perfect,” said NCLR #BornPerfect Campaign Coordinator Samantha Ames.

“This complaint builds on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s groundbreaking lawsuit against New Jersey conversion therapy provider JONAH, in which a state jury unanimously found that its so called ‘therapy’ program, which incorporated PCC’s weekend-in-the-woods conversion therapy services, was consumer fraud and an unconscionable commercial practice,” said Scott McCoy, SPLC senior staff attorney. “Our case shut JONAH down, shed light on PCC’s harmful practices, and helped develop this important action to stop PCC and others in this industry from misleading and harming more people.”

The complaint comes as the movement to end “conversion therapy” continues to gain momentum.

Earlier this month, Sens. Patty Murray of Washington and Cory Booker of New Jersey, joined by California Reps. Jackie Speier and Ted Lieu, issued a letter to the FTC urging the agency to use its authority to take “all actions possible to stop the unfair, deceptive and fraudulent practice of conversion therapy. ...”

Their request follows a groundbreaking Department of Health and Human Services report called “[Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth](#),” and months after President Obama, Senior White House Advisor Valerie Jarrett and U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy [issued independent statements](#) calling for an end to the practices.

Last year, a SPLC lawsuit forced the New Jersey “conversion therapy” provider JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing) to permanently stop its bogus program and pay damages to plaintiffs. A jury found that JONAH had committed consumer fraud and engaged in unconscionable commercial practices in violation of state law.

California, Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon and the District of Columbia have passed laws protecting LGBT minors from “conversion therapy,” and more than 20 states have

introduced similar legislation this year. New York is also adopting regulations to protect youth from "conversion therapy" as a result of executive action by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo.

Read the full complaint to the FTC [here](#). The law firm Cooley LLP serves as counsel to the petitioners in this matter.

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