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Feb. 10, 2015

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**New Jersey Judge Rules Conversion Therapy Group
Can't Claim Homosexuality is a Disorder**

*Marketing Conversion Therapy with Misrepresentation
Homosexuality is a Disorder Violates Consumer Fraud Law*

JERSEY CITY, N.J. – A New Jersey Superior Court judge has ruled that misrepresenting that homosexuality is a disorder in marketing conversion therapy services violates the state's consumer protection laws – a devastating ruling for the conversion therapy industry, which claims to “convert” people from gay to straight, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) announced today.

The ruling marks the first time a court in the United States has found that homosexuality is not a disease or a disorder and that it is fraudulent for conversion therapists to make such a claim. Superior Court Judge Peter F. Barsio Jr. found that it “is a misrepresentation in violation of [New Jersey’s Consumer Fraud Act], in advertising or selling conversion therapy services, to describe homosexuality, not as being a normal variation of human sexuality, but as being a mental illness, disease, disorder, or equivalent thereof.” Evidence at trial will establish that JONAH repeatedly made such misrepresentations.

The ruling is part of the consumer fraud lawsuit filed by the SPLC against Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH), a New Jersey-based conversion therapy provider. The suit claims the group used deceptive practices to lure plaintiffs into their costly services for gay-to-straight therapy that can cost in excess of \$10,000 a year.

“This ruling is monumental and devastating to the conversion therapy industry,” said David Dinielli, SPLC deputy legal director. “For the first time, a court has ruled that it is fraudulent as a matter of law for conversion therapists to tell clients that they have a mental disorder that can be cured. This is the principal lie the conversion therapy industry uses throughout the country to peddle its quackery to vulnerable clients. Gay people don’t need to be cured, and we are thrilled that the court has recognized this.”

“The judge’s determination today that it is a misrepresentation to tell consumers that homosexuality is a disorder is an important step forward in this case and also a victory for

showing that conversion therapy proponents lack any valid basis to continue to promote their abusive practices,” said SPLC co-counsel James L. Bromley, a partner at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP. “The harmful myth that gay people are sick or damaged belongs in the dustbin of history.”

The judge also ruled that JONAH is in violation of the Consumer Fraud Act if it offers specific success statistics for its services when “client outcomes are not tracked and no records of client outcomes are maintained” because “there is no factual basis for calculating such statistics.” Evidence at trial will show that JONAH has misrepresented that their conversion therapy works based on bogus statistics.

Conversion therapy, also called reparative therapy, is rejected by all major American medical, psychiatric, psychological and professional counseling organizations. The suit claims JONAH’s abusive practices included counselors instructing young men to undress and stand naked in a circle with a counselor. They organized group activities in which clients were directed to re-enact past abuse. These violent role-play exercises and “therapy” techniques alienated some clients from their families and taught them to blame family members or themselves for being gay.

Just last week, the judge ordered that several of JONAH’s witnesses—some of the country’s most prominent conversion therapy proponents, including well-known supporter Joseph Nicolosi—are not allowed to testify as defense experts in the upcoming trial, scheduled for this summer. The judge also excluded key conversion therapy supporters Christopher Doyle, James Phelan and John Diggs. Their “expertise” will not be permitted at trial because it is unscientific and rests on the false premise that homosexuality is a disorder.

Nicolosi is a psychologist and author of the book, “A Parent’s Guide To Preventing Homosexuality” and founder of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), which claims homosexuality is caused by psychological trauma or other “aberrations” experienced in childhood. Doyle is a conversion therapist who leads the International Healing Foundation. Phelan, a frequent spokesman for NARTH, is a previous leader of NARTH’s Scientific Advisory Committee, which does not produce actual scientific research.

Michael Ferguson, et al., v. JONAH, et al. was filed by the SPLC in November 2012 and co-counsel Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton LLP and Lite DePalma Greenberg LLC on behalf of former JONAH clients and two parents of former clients. The suit also names JONAH’s founder Arthur Goldberg and counselor Alan Downing as defendants.

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The Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Alabama with offices in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi, is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society. For more information, see www.splcenter.org