

Emily Tarsell, LCPC re SB 41 – Finance Committee - UNF

Chairman and Senators of the Finance Committee,

My name is Emily Tarsell and I am a licensed mental health therapist and mother. I have worked with many children, adolescents and families in schools, clinics and private settings. I am here today to testify in opposition to SB41.

Parents have repeatedly defeated past legislative attempts that would undermine parental rights and would naively treat minors like little adults. A minor does not have the maturity to determine if a diagnosis or treatment is appropriate and a diagnosis is in one's chart forever. A minor would not know if their medical or family history contraindicated a treatment. If the minor had post treatment adverse events, caretakers would be deprived of information in seeking appropriate care and be barred from potential legal action which they would otherwise have.

According to a 2010 Supreme Court decision, "Developments in psychology and brain science continue to show fundamental differences between juvenile and adult minds"[1]. In the justice system, we correctly do not treat children and adolescents like adults.

Based on well established developmental stages, **NO** 12 year old (or even a 16 year old) has the mental and emotional maturity of an adult. According to Dr. Laurence Steinberg's study of "neuroplasticity", adolescence continues up until age 25 because an individual's brain isn't fully formed until then [2,3].

This bill would not give minors a voice for self protection but rather make them more vulnerable to opportunistic exploitation. School programs already allow a child to privately seek counseling and there already exist laws to protect minors against abuse. As a clinician, I have always found the best outcomes for minors result from working together with them **and** their caretakers.

Please protect our minors and **veto SB 41**. Thank you.

Emily Tarsell, LCPC

References:

1. <https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-7412.pdf>
2. Steinberg L. **New Science of Adolescence**. calls for a radical change in how we think about and deal with adolescents. For starters, he redefines the term adolescence to include 10-year-olds to young adults up to the age of 25, reflecting a stage of development in which they aren't yet socially or financially independent from their parents and their brains aren't yet fully mature. To make this case, he draws on science that suggests individuals have heightened "neuroplasticity" during this stage of life, where their brains are more malleable than in adulthood.
3. Steinberg, Laurence (12 June 2013). "The influence of neuroscience on US Supreme Court decisions about adolescents' criminal culpability". *Nature*. **14** (7): 5518. doi:10.1038/nrn3509. PMID23756633. S2CID12544303.