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**Groundbreaking SPLC Lawsuit Forces New Jersey Group to Cease Bogus  
'Conversion Therapy' Program, Pay Damages**

JERSEY CITY, N.J. – A gay-to-straight “conversion therapy” provider found by a state jury to have violated New Jersey’s consumer fraud protections will permanently cease operations and dissolve its corporate entity as part of a settlement that precludes an appeal of a jury’s verdict in the landmark lawsuit.

Superior Court Judge Peter F. Bariso Jr. on Friday granted a permanent injunction after an agreement by both parties requiring JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing) to shut down entirely and prohibiting founder Arthur Goldberg and counselor Alan Downing from engaging in any form of conversion therapy commerce in New Jersey.

The jury in the case found unanimously on June 25 that by offering services it claimed could turn gay people straight, JONAH committed consumer fraud and engaged in unconscionable commercial practices.

The therapy, based on the idea that LGBT people are sick and need to be cured, has been denounced by every major U.S. medical and mental health association. Not only can it be psychologically damaging, the American Psychological Association has noted that it promotes a climate of bigotry and discrimination against the LGBT community.

“JONAH’s conversion therapy program harmed countless LGBT people and their families,” said David Dinielli, SPLC deputy legal director. “JONAH peddled discredited, pseudo-scientific treatments to people who weren’t sick, who weren’t broken, and who needed nothing but love and support.

“The end of JONAH signals that conversion therapy, however packaged, is fraudulent – plain and simple. Other conversion therapy providers would be well-advised to examine what happened to JONAH, and to abandon their foolish efforts to make gay people straight.”

New York-based Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP and New Jersey-based Lite DePalma Greenberg LLC served as SPLC’s co-counsel in the case, the first case in the nation to challenge conversion therapy under a state consumer fraud act.

“JONAH is finally being held accountable for the untold harm it inflicted on hundreds of people. I’m proud to see an organization that preyed on and exploited vulnerable young men and women shutting its doors,” said James Bromley, partner at co-counsel Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP.

The SPLC filed the lawsuit – *Michael Ferguson, et al., v. JONAH* – in 2012. The case has reinforced state efforts to ban the practice and inspired consumer fraud-based federal legislation. President Obama in April [publicly supported](#) a nationwide ban against conversion therapy.

Under the settlement, the defendants will pay the full \$72,400 in damages awarded by the jury to compensate the plaintiffs for the fees they paid to JONAH and for remedial mental health counseling for one plaintiff. The proposed judgment includes a \$3.5 million award of legal fees. The plaintiffs agreed to accept an undisclosed portion of that award, but the defendants will be liable for the full amount if they violate the agreement.

JONAH will be required to shut down all of its operations within 30 days after the order is entered, and its websites and online listservs must be removed. JONAH also will have to liquidate its assets and permanently dissolve as a corporate entity within six months.

“Defendants are permanently enjoined from engaging, whether directly or through referrals, in any therapy, counseling, treatment or activity that has the goal of changing, affecting or influencing sexual orientation, ‘same-sex attraction’ or ‘gender wholeness’ or any other equivalent term,” in New Jersey, including advertising or promoting the practice, the order states. Downing must stop providing conversion therapy to current clients within 30 days of the order.”

The plaintiffs – three young men and two mothers – lauded the development.

“I’m hopeful that this will be an important step in making sure that no one is ever harmed by conversion therapy again,” said Chaim Levin. He was raised in an Orthodox Jewish family and entered JONAH’s program at 18. “I want to thank my attorneys and parents for supporting me and my mom for bravely testifying. It wasn’t easy on her, but she made me proud to be her son.”

His mother, Bella, paid about \$4,000 for treatment and testified about JONAH’s harm and false promises. “It was a mistake on my part that I did not question Goldberg too much,” she testified at trial. “He was just a really good salesman.”

Michael Ferguson, who is from a Mormon community, said JONAH’s destructive practices affected him deeply. “Gay conversion therapy stole years from my life, and nearly stole my life,” Ferguson said after the settlement. “My hope is that others can be spared the unneeded harm that comes from the lies the defendants and those like them spread.”

As part of the settlement, JONAH will not appeal the jury verdict reached by seven jurors after a three-week trial in June that drew national and international media attention.

In a seminal [pre-trial ruling](#) on Feb. 5, Bariso excluded several leading gay conversion therapy proponents, including Joseph Nicolosi and Christopher Doyle, from testifying as defense experts. Ruling that their opinions were based on the false premise that homosexuality is a disorder, Bariso wrote that “the theory that homosexuality is a disorder is not novel but – like the notion that the earth is flat and the sun revolves around it – instead is outdated and refuted.”

Testimony at the trial revealed the JONAH program’s bizarre and abusive techniques, which included instructing men to undress and instructing one plaintiff to touch his genitals in a private counseling session. JONAH orchestrated violent role-play exercises, encouraging clients to beat effigies of their mothers who were sometimes blamed for their sons’ homosexuality. Male counselors advocated “healthy touch” sessions that included prolonged cuddling. JONAH’s tactics alienated some clients from their families and caused them to blame themselves or family members for their sexual orientation.

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