



NAME CHANGES FOR THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

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Hybrid Training

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Trainers:

Krystal Kane, Esq., Blank Rome LLP

BK Katzmman, Esq., Ballard Spahr LLP

Lisa Swaminathan, Esq., Ballard Spahr LLP

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VIP is grateful to Adrian Lowe, Esq., of the AIDS Law Project and the Jaci Adams Identity Initiative, and Ballard Spahr LLP, including Elizabeth Lilly, Esq., for creating the content of this training manual and the accompanying template forms.

About Philadelphia VIP

Mission: Philadelphia VIP leverages the powerful resources of the community to provide quality volunteer legal services and ensure access to justice for low-income Philadelphians

Philadelphia VIP is the hub of pro bono legal services in Philadelphia. For the past forty years, we have provided legal services for low-income residents and families facing civil legal problems that threaten their basic human needs – shelter, employment, financial stability, education and health.

VIP, through its volunteers and staff, serves more than 3,500 individuals and families yearly who could not afford attorneys and whose cases could or would not be handled by other public interest organizations. We are the agency of last resort for the majority of our clients.

Our clients are among the poorest in the City and region and their numbers are growing. To be eligible for our services a client's income must be at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. Thus, our most financially secure clients earn approximately \$25,000, while a family of 4 lives on \$53,000.

VIP serves a multi-lingual population, principally Spanish speaking, but increasingly we see clients who speak Creole (Haitians), Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian, and Russian, a reflection of growing and changing immigration patterns in the Greater Philadelphia area.

VIP handles any civil matter that is non-fee generating and for which there is no right to counsel. Our caseload has four priority areas:

- Maintaining income (Estate planning, employment/wage claims, tax issues, disability, consumer debt, litigation defense)
- Preventing homelessness (probate, quiet titles, tangled titles, mortgage foreclosure, landlord/tenant evictions and appeals)
- Supporting family stability (child custody, adoption/guardianship, child support, divorce, and name change); and
- Promoting community economic development.

The majority of VIP's cases are referred to us from our sister organizations, Community Legal Services and Philadelphia Legal Assistance; an additional number come from specialized legal services organizations throughout Philadelphia.

In stark terms, VIP is the agency of last resort for many low-income individuals and families who face critical legal problems that affect their basic needs.

Frequently Asked Volunteer Questions

Q: What happens after I accept a VIP case?

A: After accepting a VIP case you will be sent a VIP referral form, all information included in the VIP file about the case and the VIP representation agreement. At this same time, your client will receive a letter with your name, address and phone number, and the request that they contact you within 7 days. You will receive a copy of this letter. At the first meeting you and the client should sign the VIP representation agreement. *The scope of representation should be filled in carefully, so that you and the client are clear about any limitations on your services.* (Contact VIP's Managing Attorney if you have any questions about the extent of your representation.) Keep the original in your file, give a copy to your client and send a copy to VIP.

Q: What if my client does not contact me?

A: Your client may fail to follow through for several reasons. Your client may have difficulty reading or understanding the letter, may not speak English, may not have received the letter or may have other more pressing problems. If your client does not call you within a few days of your receipt of the VIP letter, try to call the client. If after 10 days your client has not contacted you, and you cannot reach them by telephone, write your client stating that if you do not hear from them within 5 days, VIP will close their file. After 5 days, if your client still has not contacted you, call or write VIP, describing your attempts to contact the client. Under most circumstances, VIP will close the case, and another client can be referred to you.

Q: What if my client doesn't have a telephone?

A: Contacting a client who doesn't have a telephone can be challenging. We recommend that you send your client a letter asking the client to call you at a specific time on a specific date and time. If your client calls while you are on another line or away from your desk, ask your assistant to suggest a time for your client to call back. After your client reaches you, ask them for the telephone number of a neighbor, relative, and/or employer where you can leave a message if necessary. Another way that you can keep in touch with a client who doesn't have a telephone is to schedule weekly telephone "appointments". (For example, the client would call you every Friday at 1:00 p.m.) By keeping "appointments" you will have the opportunity to communicate information to the client.

Q: What if my client does not keep our appointments?

A: Terminating representation of a client due to his/her/their failure to cooperate is left up to the discretion of the volunteer. Some clients are simply uncooperative, while other clients have personal problems or mental impairments that interfere with their ability to keep appointments. Address this problem with your client and make it clear that without his/her/their cooperation you will be unable to help him/her/they. If, after the discussion, the situation continues, you should contact VIP's Managing Attorney and discuss closing the case.

Q: What if my client doesn't speak English?

A: If you are not fluent in the primary language of your client, VIP can arrange a volunteer to translate. Initially, we request that you first draw on your firm's resources. If your firm is unable to arrange an interpreter, please contact VIP and we will assist you. If the client speaks Spanish, VIP has Spanish-speaking staff members who have already translated many forms into Spanish. It is a good idea to ask your client for the telephone number of a friend, neighbor or relative of the client who can communicate with both of you. If you plan to relay confidential information through the client's interpreter, you should discuss this with your client.

Additional steps must be taken with the Court if your client does not speak English. If a hearing has been scheduled, you should contact the Court to inform the Court that your client will need an interpreter. In addition to the Court's interpreter who interprets the proceedings, you may want to have an interpreter with you at counsel table, so that you can communicate confidentially with your client during the proceedings. This interpreter is not provided by the Court. If you are submitting any documents that are not in English, the documents must be translated and the translation must be certified. VIP can provide information on how to certify the translation.

Q: What if I am fluent in another language and would like to volunteer to interpret for other volunteers?

A: VIP is always in need of volunteers with proficiency in foreign languages. We generally need interpreters who speak Spanish, Russian, French or Vietnamese. Whatever foreign languages you speak, however, please contact VIP because we may have a client who needs your help.

Q: What if there are costs associated with my representation?

A: VIP will cover certain costs only if approval is obtained from VIP before the cost is incurred. The costs encountered most often are:

- Photocopying medical records - You should first write the doctor and/or hospital and request that the fee be waived. If the doctor refuses, you should ask the client if he/she has the money to pay for the expense. If they do not, VIP may pay to obtain the records if VIP approves the cost before it is incurred.
- Filing fees - The client should qualify for In Forma Pauperis (IFP) status. An IFP petition must be filed with the Court. If the client's IFP petition is denied, the client must pay the filing fees unless VIP determines that the denial was unjustified. VIP has copies of IFP petitions and can explain to you the procedure for filing an IFP.
- VIP determines whether or not to cover litigation expenses on a case-by-case basis. If you would like VIP to cover a cost that is not listed above, please contact a VIP staff member to discuss.

Q: What if I determine that my case lacks merit?

A: You should not represent a client if you believe the case is not meritorious. Even if you do not represent your client, you provide a valuable service by explaining the situation to your client, advising your client of available options, and suggesting ways to avoid the problem in the future. If you are not sure of the merits of the case, contact a VIP staff member to discuss.

Q: What do I do when my case is finished?

A: You should write a letter to VIP stating the outcome of the case, providing the closing letter you sent to the client, estimating the number of hours you spent on the case, and indicating whether you are available to take another case.

Thank You for Volunteering!

THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE

I. CONTEXT

Federal Executive Orders, Policy and Potential Legislation

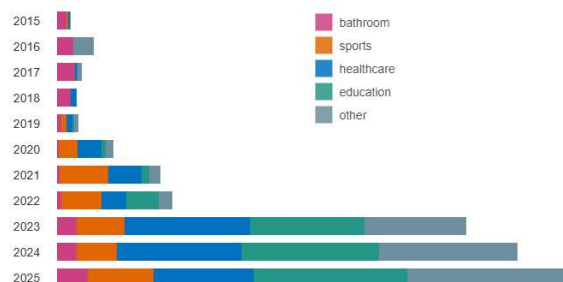
1. Reporting from Erin Reed, <https://www.erininthemorning.com/>
 - a. A Line By Line Analysis Of Trump's Big Anti-Trans Executive Order (January 21, 2025)
 - b. Trump Military Ban Says Being Trans Conflicts With “Honorable, Truthful, Disciplined Lifestyle” (January 27, 2025)
 - c. A Line By Line Analysis Of Trump's Youth Care Ban Executive Order (January 27, 2025)
2. Lambda Legal Info Session – Know Your Rights: Passports (February 26, 2025) – video linked here

State Legislation and Policy

3. ACLU Tracker - <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2025>
4. Trans Legislation Tracker - <https://translegislation.com/>

Tracking the rise of anti-trans bills in the U.S.

The United States has experienced a long rise in anti-trans legislation. Now it's surging.



Hover for bill totals or see bill count chart below

5. Identity Document Laws and Policies
 - a. Advocates For Trans Equality (A4TE) ID Documents Center - <https://transequality.org/documents>

****We recommend A4TE’s state-level policy tracker to begin your search for birth certificate requirements by state.**

- b. Movement Advancement Project's Birth Certificate Map (as of March 17, 2025) – https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/identity_documents/birth_certificate



c.

Selections from a Philadelphia Inquirer article from April 1, 2021 - How to support trans people in Philly, according to trans people (full article linked here)

6. Context:

- a. “‘We are currently in the midst of an extremely vitriolic period, where hate is fueled even from our nation’s highest office,’ wrote Tori Cooper, the HRC’s director of community engagement for the transgender justice initiative, in an email. ‘At times like these, we need allies to speak out on behalf of the entire community more than ever.’”

7. Understand that this has been a lifelong struggle:

- a. Christian Lovehall (he, him), facilitator at Trans Masculine Advocacy Network and founder of the Philly Trans March – “I was assigned female at birth. But I was born me. I didn’t wake up one day and say, ‘Hey, I want to be a boy.’ I just knew that I didn’t identify with anything that was associated with being a girl. It just felt wrong.”
- b. Naiymah Sanchez (she, her), Senior Organizer at the ACLU Pennsylvania – “For some reason, when people find out you are trans, they sometimes go the extra mile to dead-name* or misgender you. They think being trans is a laughing matter versus a struggle.”

- i. *Dead-naming is calling a trans person by the name they used before they transitioned.
- 8. You can be more than an ally:
 - a. Kendall Stephens (she, her), board of directors at the William Way Community Center – “Allies validate and uplift. Allies affirm the spirit. When allies affirm us, it shows us that they are in our corner. An ally takes every opportunity to spread messages of inclusion. Allies don’t let negative narratives about trans people to flourish in their spaces.”
 - b. Janis Stacy (she, her), activist: “If you have a fight [that is] right in front of you — you want a piece of legislation passed, you need help with a hate crime ordinance, or some religious group is persecuting you — an ally will go with you, but allies don’t tend to stick around after the fight is over. A true ally fights with you beyond the individual efforts. They are there with you over decades. An ally uses their privilege to get you through life.”

WORKING WITH CLIENTS WHO ARE IN THE TRANS COMMUNITY

I. CLIENT INTERACTIONS

You need to be a person your client is safe to work with. It helps to ASK questions if you aren't sure of someone's identity, name, pronouns, etc.

Pronouns and honorifics

Please note that these are not the only pronouns. There are an infinite number of pronouns as new ones emerge in our language. Always ask someone for their pronouns.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

transstudent.tumblr.com
facebook.com/transstudent
twitter.com/transstudent

Design by Landyn Pan

For more information,
go to transstudent.org/graphics

TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources

► Current title

☐ Mr
 ☐ Mx
 ☐ Mrs
 ☐ Dr
 ☐ Miss
 ☐ Other
 ☐ Ms

1. NEVER assume
 - a. NEVER based on gender presentation
 - b. NEVER based on stated identity
2. ALWAYS use your client's chosen name and pronouns
3. A client may use alternating terms for their identity and may use more than one pronoun or no pronouns.
4. If you don't know, ASK ("What are your pronouns?")

Meeting your client

1. When meeting your client for the first time, introduce yourself and share your pronouns.
2. Inform your client that you do not need to talk about any medical information or their transition history. All we need to know is that the person in front of us wants to change their legal name!
3. Confirm their chosen name and pronouns. Whenever possible, open the file internally using these, to minimize the chance of deadnaming or misgendering.
 - a. Don't assume, just ask! Your client may use alternating terms to describe their identity and may use more than one pronoun, a neopronoun, or no pronouns.
 - b. Confirm when and where the chosen name and pronouns should be used; for example, your client may not be out to their family, roommates, etc., so sending (postal) mail using their chosen name could out them and put them in an unsafe situation.
4. Remember that identity can change! Your client might use different terms to describe themselves compared with those they used in the past.

Handling mistakes

1. If you make a mistake with your client's name, identity, or pronouns, correct yourself, quickly apologize, and move on.
2. Keep the focus on your client, not you.
3. Address any feelings later, with someone you trust – not with your client.
4. Your client likely faces misgendering regularly. Don't put them in the position of needing to reassure you that it's okay; that's more emotional labor when being trans or gender diverse in a world that is very cis- and hetero- centric.

HANDLING A NAME CHANGE CASE

STEP 1: Engagement letter and initial phone call

- Once you have established representation with your client (via engagement letter, intake, or other contact), call them or set up a time to meet to introduce yourself and discuss representation.
 - Make sure you are always using their preferred name and pronouns.
 - Explain that you will follow up this phone conversation with an email so they know what they need to do next.
 - In this initial call, ask the client for the following information:
 - If not on the intake, confirm the spelling of their full legal name and full chosen name (including middle names where applicable);
 - State of birth;
 - Current address and month and year they moved there;
 - Last 5 years of addresses including timing (month and year);
 - Whether they have a criminal record or outstanding judgments;
 - If they have a criminal record or judgments, reassure them that this does not necessarily stop them from obtaining a legal name change, it merely changes some of the requirements for the petition. If they have an outstanding bench warrant, discuss the risks of the court/police being notified of the name change and the possibility of the bench warrant being effectuated.
 - Explain that we will petition to have all fees waived so all they will be responsible for is the cost for fingerprints (about \$25) and the costs of updating their identity documents after name change.
 - The follow-up email will include instructions on fingerprints. We recommend Rosa's Photo Truck on 16th and Callowhill. They are very trans-inclusive and relatively inexpensive.

- Schedule a time for them to meet you in person. They will need to bring exhibits and their fingerprint card, so keep that in mind when scheduling. Offer to follow up to schedule a time via email.
 - They will need to bring originals or copies of:
 - Birth certificate;
 - License/ID;
 - Social Security Card;
 - Proof of address (if license/ID shows current address, that is sufficient);
 - Original fingerprint card.
- Give them a timeline: generally, it takes about 2-3 months after filing until you have decrees in hand. We will keep them updated throughout the process as the court provides updates.

STEP 2: Send an email to the client detailing next steps

- See [Name change client email templates](#).

STEP 3: Draft the petition and file

- See [Philadelphia Adult Name Change with Waiver of Publication – TEMPLATE](#) for a template *In Forma Pauperis* Petition, Name Change Petition, Motion to Seal and Waive Publication, and Proposed Orders & Decree
- See [Confidential Information Form](#).
- Tips:
 - Draft the petition without exhibits—you will add those during the in-person meeting.
 - Required documentation:
 1. Birth certificate or green card (copy)
 2. State-issued photo ID (copy)
 3. Social Security card (copy)

4. An **original** fingerprint card (See Cover Letter for Submitting Fingerprints to Clerk for cover letter templates to attach with certain filings)
 5. Proof of residency, if photo identification has a different address
 6. Unless filing in forma pauperis, the filing fee of \$348.23
- Additional Considerations:
 1. Update the caption with the client's current legal name ONLY and the current month/year. (The caption appears on public records.)
 2. The petition requires the client's addresses for the past 5 years. **These addresses will also be necessary for judgment searches.**
 - a. Note: if your client has experienced periods of homelessness, you can list those as "no fixed address"; include the city or zip code if possible.
 - b. Be sure to redact the current address on the petition so it does not reveal the last digit(s) of the street number or the apartment number. This information will be available to the court through the Confidential Information form, but redacting it in the filing increases the safety and privacy of the petitioner. (See Confidential Information Form for template).
 3. If the client's birth certificate is NOT from PA, review state law for changing a birth certificate for any specific requirements in the decree and draft accordingly.
 - a. TransEquality.org has a great resource on updating ID docs, with information on each state. For example, some require the birth certificate number, birthdate, and/or location of birth to be included in the court order.
 4. Notes on criminal history:
 - a. If the client has a criminal record, ensure that you use the proper language in the petition depending on if they have record of a misdemeanor or felony.
 - b. Misdemeanor convictions do not affect one's ability to legally change their name
 - c. Felony convictions of felonies that are not listed in 54 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 702: Two-year barrier (following completion of sentence, including parole)
 - d. Felony convictions of felonies specifically listed in 54 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 702: Technically a lifetime barrier to name change
 - e. Attorneys from the AIDS Law Project, TLDEF and Reed Smith have succeeded in obtaining decrees for at least three petitioners despite felony convictions, but there is no appellate precedent.
 - f. Template has language for a number of different common situations.

- g. If you are interested in challenging the felony bar whether in general or for a specific client, please reach out to us to connect you with those who are working to change the law.

STEP 4: Meet with your client

- Go through the petition with the client. Have them check spelling, addresses, and other details for typos. For the parts of the petition that list the reasons for name change, remind them that we keep that as simple as possible—the court does not need specific information and we do not need to share private details more than absolutely necessary, but if they would like to change the phrasing or add more details, that is their call.
 - It is possible that some transgender clients will also be changing their name to separate themselves from abusive or unsafe family members/situations. This is also a valid reason for a name change and a valid reason to waive publication. If a client brings up this reason and/or would like to avoid including their transgender identity as a reason for a name change, this is a permissible alternative.
- Make copies of the exhibits, redact them, and add the redacted version to the petition.
- If everything is correct, have the client sign the verification. **They can sign in their chosen name.**
- Ensure the petition is complete with exhibits and ready for filing.
- Make sure you get the fingerprint card from the client.

STEP 5: E-file the petition

1. Log onto the Philadelphia Courts e-filing system.
2. Select “**New Case.**”
3. From the dropdown menus:
 - a. Program: **Petitions;**
 - b. Case Type: **Change of Name (Adult);**
 - c. Hit **Continue.**

Courts

ing System

You are in Page | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Program

Petitions

▼

Case Type

Change Of Name (Adult)

▼

Commencement of Action

☐ Complaint

☒ Petition Action

☐ Declaration of Taking

☐ Notice of Appeal

☐ Writ of Summons

Name Change Petition - Helpful Hints

[Click Here](#)

Continue >>

4. Parties:
 - a. Party type: **Petitioner**;
 - b. **Select**: If party is an individual then enter the name below;
 - c. Enter **legal last name and legal first name**;
 - d. Select “**No**” for any AKA or Alternative name;
 - e. Street address:
 - i. **c/o Lawyer name**
 - ii. **Firm address**
 - f. **Decline** to provide birthdate;
 - g. Hit “**Add**;
 - h. Hit “**Continue**.”

Parties

Filing attorney will be automatically added as a party, please continue adding other parties.

*Party Type Petitioner

☐ *Entity ID

1 [Entity List](#)

☒ If party is an individual then enter name below.

*Last Name First Name Middle Suffix²
Legal Last Legal First

☐ *if party is a company.

(Maximum of 60 characters, abbreviate if necessary)

Is there an Alternative Name/AKA./DBA, etc. ? ☐ Yes ☒ No

*Street Address

c/o Lawyer Name
Address

*City Philadelphia

*State/Province
PA - Pennsylvania

*Zip Code 19103

[US Zip Codes](#) [Canada Postal Codes](#)

*Country United States Of America

Please enter date of birth of party, if known:

☐ Unknown ☒ Decline to provide info.

Note: Date of birth information is intended for the Court's use only. The information will not be made available to the public.

²Suffix Name (Example: Jr, Sr, MD, III, PhD etc.)

²Suffix Name (Example: Jr, Sr, MD, III, PhD etc.)

-- Number of Parties entered: 1 --

Legal First Legal Last (Petitioner) , Decline to provide Birth Date
C/O Lawyer Name Address , Philadelphia, Pa 19103 , United States c

To remove a party, scroll through the list then click on the name and hit the "Delete" button.



5. Name change questionnaire: write “See petition” for everything except their name.
- a. Reasons for name change: **See petition;**
 - b. Address: **See petition;**
 - c. Other/old address(es): **See petition;**
 - d. Years: “**5**” total of all address(es) stayed above;
 - e. Current name: **LEGAL FIRST LEGAL LAST;**
 - f. New name: **Chosen name;**
 - g. Re-enter New name: **Chosen Name;**
 - h. Hit “**continue.**”

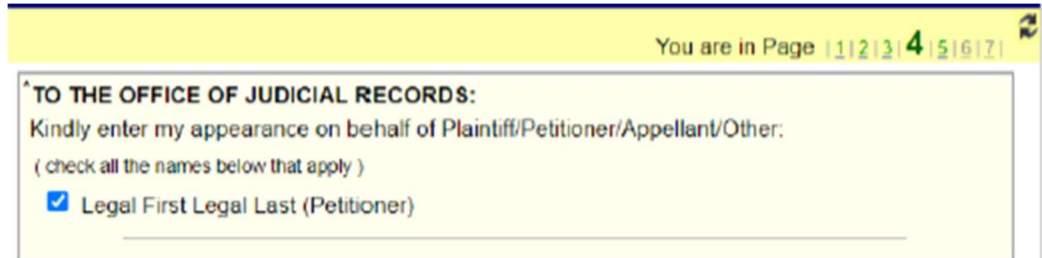
The screenshot shows a web form titled "Name Change Questionnaire" within the "Pennsylvania Courts Case Management System". The form is on page 3 of a 7-page sequence. It contains several input fields and sections:

- Reasons for Name Change:** A text box containing "See petition".
- Address:** A text box containing "See petition".
- Other/Old Address(es):** Two numbered text boxes, both containing "See petition".
- Years:** A text box containing "5", followed by the text "Total of all address(es) stayed above".
- Current Name:** A text box containing "LEGAL FIRST LEGAL LAST".
- New Name:** A text box containing "Chosen Name".
- Re-enter New Name:** A text box containing "Chosen Name".
- Personal Reference No.:** A text box with a "(Maximum of 30 characters)" label above it. Below the box is the instruction: "If you have any numbering system in your office, enter it here."

At the bottom of the form, there are two buttons: "<< Back" and "Continue >>". Below these buttons is a blue silhouette of the Liberty Bell and a copyright notice: "Copyright ©2002-2008 First Judicial District of Pennsylvania. All Rights Reserved."

6. To the Office of Judicial Record:

- a. **Check the box** to enter your appearance;
- b. Review the contacts for electronic notice for accuracy.

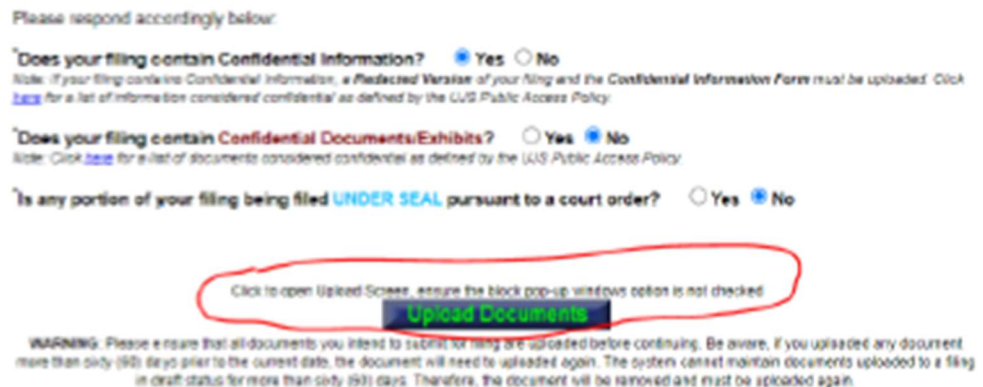


You are in Page |1|2|3|**4**|5|6|7|

*** TO THE OFFICE OF JUDICIAL RECORDS:**
Kindly enter my appearance on behalf of Plaintiff/Petitioner/Appellant/Other:
(check all the names below that apply)
☒ Legal First Legal Last (Petitioner)

7. Uploading files

- a. Does your filing contain Confidential Information? **YES;**
- b. Does your filing contain Confidential Documents/Exhibits: **NO;**
- c. Is there any portion of your filing being filed UNDER SEAL pursuant to a court order? **NO;**
- d. Select **“Upload Documents.”**



Please respond accordingly below:

*Does your filing contain Confidential Information? ☒ Yes ☐ No
Note: If your filing contains Confidential Information, a Redacted Version of your filing and the Confidential Information Form must be uploaded. Click [here](#) for a list of information considered confidential as defined by the US Public Access Policy.

*Does your filing contain Confidential Documents/Exhibits? ☐ Yes ☒ No
Note: Click [here](#) for a list of documents considered confidential as defined by the US Public Access Policy.

*Is any portion of your filing being filed UNDER SEAL pursuant to a court order? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Click to open Upload Screens, ensure the block pop-up windows option is not checked

Upload Documents

WARNING: Please ensure that all documents you intend to submit for filing are uploaded before continuing. Be aware, if you uploaded any document more than sixty (60) days prior to the current date, the document will need to be uploaded again. The system cannot maintain documents uploaded to a filing in draft status for more than sixty (60) days. Therefore, the document will be removed and must be uploaded again.

- e. On the first pop-up (Redacted documents file upload area),
 - i. Click “Choose file;”
 - ii. Select the completed redacted **Petition;**
 - iii. Click “Add file now;”
 - iv. Click “Finish/Next.”

REDACTED DOCUMENTS FILE UPLOAD AREA

In this area, only upload all REDACTED versions of the documents from which all CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION has been removed.

Please limit the maximum file size for each document to 50Mb
and do not use these characters in the file name * ? < > | # { } ~ : &

Choose a file to attach: (must be a PDF file)

Name Chan...XAMPLE.pdf

Add file to the list:

[Click here to estimate the file download time](#)

Current File Attachments:

	File Name	Size

To delete an attachment, check the file you want deleted then click on the delete icon.

A file format created by Adobe®

Click the FINISH button after all REDACTED files have been uploaded.

Note: These documents will be viewable by the public.

v.

REDACTED DOCUMENTS FILE UPLOAD AREA

In this area, only upload all REDACTED versions of the documents from which all CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION has been removed.

Please limit the maximum file size for each document to 50Mb
and do not use these characters in the file name * ? < > | # { } ~ : &

Choose a file to attach: (must be a PDF file)

No file chosen

Add file to the list:

[Click here to estimate the file download time](#)

Current File Attachments:

	File Name	Size
<input type="checkbox"/>	Name Change Petition Packet - EXAMPLE.pdf	710,993 bytes

To delete an attachment, check the file you want deleted then click on the delete icon.

A file format created by Adobe®

Click the FINISH button after all REDACTED files have been uploaded.

Note: These documents will be viewable by the public.

vi.

- f. On the second pop-up (Confidential information form file upload area),
 - i. Click “Choose file;”
 - ii. Select the completed **Confidential Information Form**;
 - iii. Click “Add file now;”
 - iv. Click “Finish/Next.”

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FORM FILE UPLOAD AREA
 In this area, only upload the CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FORM.

Please limit the maximum file size for each document to 50Mb
 and do not use these characters in the file name * ? < > | # { } ~ : &

Choose a file to attach: (must be a PDF file)

Choose File Confidential ...AMPLE.pdf

Add file to the list:

Add File Now [Click here to estimate the file download time](#)

Current File Attachments:

	File Name	Size

To delete an attachment, check the file you want deleted then click on the delete icon.

A file format created by Adobe®

Click the FINISH button after all CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FORM/FILE have been uploaded.

Previous Finish/Next Note: These documents will be viewable by court personnel and case participants, but not the public.

v.

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FORM FILE UPLOAD AREA
 In this area, only upload the CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FORM

Please limit the maximum file size for each document to 50Mb
 and do not use these characters in the file name * ? < > | # { } ~ : &

Choose a file to attach: (must be a PDF file)

Choose File No file chosen

Add file to the list:

Add File Now [Click here to estimate the file download time](#)

Current File Attachments:

	File Name	Size
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confidential Information Form - EXAMPLE.pdf	167,221 bytes

To delete an attachment, check the file you want deleted then click on the delete icon.

A file format created by Adobe®

Click the FINISH button after all CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FORM/FILE have been uploaded.

Previous Finish/Next Note: These documents will be viewable by court personnel and case participants, but not the public.

vi.

- g. On the third pop-up (Public documents containing no confidential information file upload area),
- i. Click “Finish;”

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS CONTAINING NO CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION
FILE UPLOAD AREA
In this area, only upload all documents that are neither considered CONFIDENTIAL nor contain CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION.

Please limit the maximum file size for each document to 50Mb
and do not use these characters in the file name ^ ? < > \ # { } ~ : &


Choose a file to attach: (must be a PDF file)

Choose File No file chosen

Add file to the list:

Add File Now [Click here to estimate the file download time](#)

Current File Attachments:

	File Name	Size
		

To delete an attachment, check the file you want deleted then click on the delete icon.

A file format created by Adobe®

Click the FINISH button after all PUBLIC DOCUMENTS CONTAINING NO CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION files have been uploaded.

Previous Finish

Note: These documents will be viewable by the public.

- h. Select the box to “Click here to certify compliance with the UJS Public Access Policy;”
- i. Click “Continue.”

Click to open Upload Screen, ensure the block pop-up windows option is not checked

Upload Documents

WARNING: Please ensure that all documents you intend to submit for filing are uploaded before continuing. Be aware, if you uploaded any document more than sixty (60) days prior to the current date, the document will need to be uploaded again. The system cannot maintain documents uploaded to a filing in draft status for more than sixty (60) days. Therefore, the document will be removed and must be uploaded again.

Redacted Documents From Which Confidential Information Has Been Removed	
File Name	Size
Name Change Petition Packet - EXAMPLE.pdf	710,993 bytes

Confidential Information Form	
File Name	Size
Confidential Information Form - EXAMPLE.pdf	167,221 bytes

Documents Which are Not Confidential and Which Do Not Contain Confidential Information	
File Name	Size
No uploaded document(s) found for this section.	

Total Documents Uploaded: 2

Certification Regarding Compliance with UJS Public Access Policy:


I certify that the filing complies with the provisions of the *Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania Case Records of the Appellate and Trial Courts* that require filing confidential information and documents differently than non-confidential information and documents.

☒ [Click here to certify compliance with the UJS Public Access Policy](#)

Name Change Petition - Helpful Hints

[Click Here](#)

<< Back Continue >>



j.

8. Select “Are you filing In Forma Pauperis and without payment of filing fees?”

a. Click “Continue.”

You are in Page 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **6** | 2

Total fee for this filing: \$ 348.23

☐ Credit Card Payment

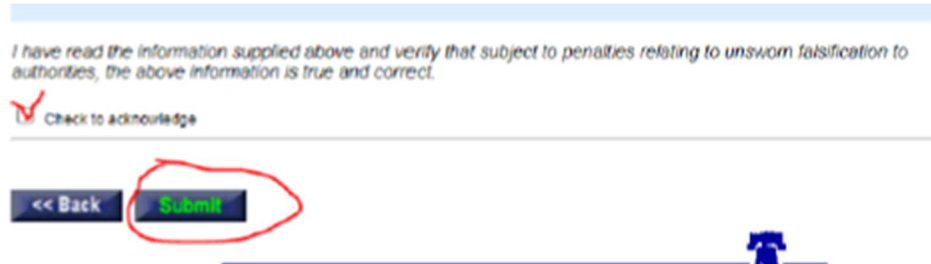
☒ Are you filing In Forma Pauperis and without payment of filing fees?

<< Back Continue >>

9. Review all the information on the final page;

a. Click “Check to acknowledge;”

b. Click “Submit.”



c.

10. You should receive an email confirming your submission and providing you with your e-filing number. Once the court has accepted the filing, you will receive another email with your case number. **This second email will also include the court provided IFP to use when submitting fingerprints and conducting judgment searches.**

A NOTE ON COSTS FOR LEGAL NAME CHANGE PROCESS & IN FORMA PAUPERIS

- Costs for Legal Name Change Process:

Required Item	Cost/Fee*	Waivable?
Fingerprints	\$20-25	No
Petition filing	\$348.23*	If IFP
Publications	\$214*	For safety reasons
Judgment searches	\$78.52*	If IFP
Certified decrees	\$41.58 (each)**	If IFP
Other costs (e.g., transportation, postage)	?	No
ESTIMATED TOTAL	\$853.65** & up	

- In Forma Pauperis (IFP)

1. 231 Pa. Code Rule 240(d)(1)

a. “If the party is represented by an attorney, the prothonotary shall allow the party to proceed in forma pauperis upon the filing of a praecipe which contains a certification by the attorney that he or she [sic] is providing free legal service to the party and believes the party is unable to pay the costs.”

2. Breaking Down 231 Pa. Code Rule 240(d)(1)
 - a. The Attorney must certify the following:
 - i. Petitioner is represented by an attorney
 - ii. Representation is pro bono
 - iii. The attorney “believes the party is unable to pay the costs”
 - b. The Prothonotary “shall allow the party to proceed *in forma pauperis* following a filing of the Praeceptum.”
3. Many legal aid organizations base clients’ eligibility (and, therefore, IFP eligibility) to a percentage of the Federal Poverty Guidelines:
<https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>
 - a. Often 125% for certain grant-supported organizations
 - b. Up to 200% or above for others
 - c. VIP utilizes a cap of 250% for name change clients
4. Best practice: if you do choose to proceed IFP, ask for income certification or verification and keep records.
5. Instead of titling the IFP as “Praeceptum to Proceed *In Forma Pauperis*,” consider “Attorney Certification of No Fee.”
 - a. This title may be helpful with judgment search clerks understanding the need to waive the fee for IFP judgment searches.
 - b. The e-filing system will auto-generate a traditional Praeceptum to Proceed *In Forma Pauperis* that some clerks prefer.
 - c. Having both the Attorney Certification of No Fee and the court auto-generated IFP ensures that the fee will be waived, regardless of the clerk you interact with or the current policy.

STEP 6: Submit any exhibits not yet submitted and drop off fingerprints at Discovery court

- If any exhibits were not included in the petition, file them with the court (City Hall Room 691) within 10 days.
- Drop off the original fingerprint card to Discovery Court (City Hall Room 691) within 10 days of filing the petition along with a copy of the court-provided IFP and cover letter (see [Cover letter for fingerprints](#)).
- Relevant contacts:
 - Office of Judicial Records:
 - City Hall, Room 284

- (215 686-6652)
- Philadelphia Discovery Court: (215) 686-7914
- Nora Gallagher (direct): (215) 686-7974; (nora.gallagher@courts.phila.gov)

Step 7: Update your client (first about the acceptance of the filing, then about the hearing date)

- Confirm with your client that the petition has been accepted, the publication requirement has been waived, and tell them their case number. Explain that the next steps are background checks and setting a hearing date. For the client, the rest of the process is a lot of waiting so reassure them that you will reach out with any updates as you have them and encourage them to reach out in the meantime if they have any questions or concerns.
- Once the hearing date has been set, notify your client and confirm their availability. Reassure the client that as long as the background checks are clear and nothing unexpected happens, they will not need to show up in person for the hearing date but you want you confirm their availability just in case.
- You can further explain that the hearing date is set because background checks need to be scheduled to occur within 30 days of that date. It may seem arbitrary since they likely will not need to attend, but that explains the process a bit more.
- See [Name Change client email templates](#).

Step 8: Within 30 days of the hearing date, conduct judgment searches.

- Family court judgment search:
 - Complete the family court judgment search form (fill in with client's name, birthdate, and social security number).
 - Bring the judgment search form and a copy of the court-generated IFP to the family court building at 1501 Arch Street.
 - Go through security and up to the 8th floor.
 - Walk past the additional security/check-in desk and go to the right to desk 1. You should not need to get a ticket to wait; desk 1 is for attorneys/represented clients.

- Tell the clerk you need to do a family court judgment search and that your client has had fees waived. Hand them the Family Court Search Form and the IFP.
 - Wait for results.
- If no results come back, submit the completed form to Discovery Court (City Hall Room 691).
- If results come back, complete an affidavit detailing the results and send a letter to creditors notifying them of the pending legal name change, if applicable. (See [Affidavit Regarding Judgments](#) and [Letter to Creditor](#)).
- Civil court judgment search:
 - Visit City Hall 264 – Office of Judicial Records – Civil Filing Unit.
 - Bring a copy of the IFP.
 - Ask the clerk to conduct a civil judgment search, and tell them your client has had fees waived. Give the clerk the IFP.
 - If no results come back, submit the completed search results to Discovery Court (City Hall Room 691).
 - If results come back for the petitioner, complete an affidavit detailing the results and send a letter to creditors notifying them of the pending legal name change (see [Affidavit Regarding Judgments](#) and [Letter to Creditor](#)).
 - Submit the results with the appropriate affidavit and copy of letter sent to creditors to Discovery Court.
- Out-of-county judgment searches:
 - If the petitioner has lived outside of Philadelphia County in the past five years, you need to conduct a judgment search for that county. Google “[county name] civil judgment search” to determine the process (e.g., a publicly accessible website similar to Philadelphia’s or calling the Prothonotary’s office to have them conduct a search).
 - Complete the affidavit and submit to Discovery Court via email or in person with search results attached.
 - See [Affidavit regarding judgments outside Philadelphia](#).
 - If the client has any outstanding judgments, complete and send a letter to creditor and submit it as an exhibit with the affidavit.
 - See [Letter to Creditor](#).

Step 9: Publish notice (if required by the court)

- We recommend seeking a waiver of the publication requirement for all transgender, nonbinary and gender expansive clients.
 1. “If the court finds that the notice [of publication of name change] would jeopardize the safety of the person seeking the name change or his or her child or ward, the notice required shall be waived by order of the court.” (see above)
 2. Your client’s personal experiences are relevant, but even if the client personally did not experience prior incidents of harassment, clients may have safety concerns based on risks created by publication.
 - a. The Legal Intelligencer website maintains a list of individuals who have published their name changes that you can search, filter, and Google - <https://www.law.com/thelegalintelligencer/public-notices/>
 3. If you would like to better understand the challenges that trans people face, we encourage you to review the results of the U.S. Transgender Survey at <https://www.ustranssurvey.org/reports>
- If necessary: information about publishing
 1. Publication 1 of 2: Legal Intelligencer
 - a. <https://www.law.com/thelegalintelligencer/static/place-a-public-notice/>
 - b. Example notice:
https://images.law.com/image/pa/ads/change_of_name_notice.pdf
 - c. free for VIP clients
 - d. Legal Intelligencer will send a notarized proof of publication
 2. Publication 2 of 2: Philadelphia Gay News (PGN) or Metro
 - a. PGN:
 - i. free
 - ii. PGN will NOT send a notarized proof of publication – you’ll need to find a paper copy, or a copy of the print edition online
 - iii. Cut out the notice (include the date on the page), and affix it to a form with the case caption
 - b. Metro:
 - i. Contact VIP for help with publishing in the Metro
 3. Bring both original proofs of notice to City Hall Room 691

Step 10: Confirm with the court that everything is complete

- **About a week before the hearing date, call Nora in Discovery Court** and ask for an update on the police background checks to confirm whether or not the hearing will be held.
 - If the police report has come back clear, there will be no hearing.
 - If the police report has not come back yet but Nora expects it will be clear, she will likely inform you that there will be no hearing. If something unexpected comes up later, she will request an affidavit explaining the situation and proof of notification to any relevant parties (creditors or supervision officers), or in very few cases, a hearing may be rescheduled.
- Contact your client to confirm that they do not need to show up anywhere on the hearing date and that a decision will be made on the papers. The last step is receiving the signed decrees. If the police report already came back, tell them that the signed decrees should be available within 2 weeks of the hearing date. If the police reports have not come back yet, it may take longer to get the signed decrees.

Step 11: Once your client's Name Change is granted

- About a week after the original hearing date, consider calling or emailing Discovery Court to check on the status of the case periodically and provide any updates to your client so they do not get concerned by any delay.
- Once name change has been granted, **pick up decrees from City Hall** (it is recommended that you go in person to pick up the decrees because they too often get lost or delayed in the mail).
 - Once you get the email that the decree was signed, coordinate with Nora so she has copies printed and certified, ready for when you plan to pick them up.
 - Send a pdf copy of the decree to your client and congratulate them! This is such an exciting moment!
- **Set a meeting with your client** for them to receive the decrees and discuss next steps. If you are meeting in the office, go downstairs to meet them so they do not need to show ID to security. In the meeting, give them their decrees and explain next steps for updating their identity documents. Encourage them to keep the decrees safe and remind them that if they ever need more, either you or they can request more from City Hall.
 - See [Name change client email templates](#).

- General advice: every institution has their own process for updating information.
 - State identification is not impacted by federal law. Currently, individuals can still change their name and gender marker on PA identification including Real ID. (Last updated March 2025, visit <https://www.pa.gov/services/dmv/change-a-driver-license-name-or-address.html> for the most up-to-date information).
 - In light of Executive Orders issued in January 2025, individuals can no longer update their gender on federal documents. This includes passports and social security cards. You can still update your name on federal documents as of March 2025.
 - Previously issued passports are still valid legal documents. The Executive Order cannot invalidate the document itself. There is still uncertainty around future validity upon renewal or how certain state agencies may treat passports with an X gender marker since that designation is no longer available.
 - Update your social security card first and then your ID/driver's license because those are often needed for other processes.
 - You do not need to update your birth certificate unless you want to.
 - Updating your social security card will update your name for the IRS, so make sure to update your name with any employer before tax documents come out. You want your ID name to match your name on your W-2, etc.
 - If the client needs the decrees to be mailed, still call the client to discuss next steps and instructions for updating their IDs.
- Send closing letter, with instructions for updating identity docs, via email (and also via mail, if your client prefers).
 - See [Name Change Closing Letter](#).

RESOURCES

I. SUBSTANTIVE LAW

A. *In re McIntyre*, 715 A. 2d 400 (Pa. 1998)

1. Holding: Under the Pennsylvania name change statute, an individual can seek a name change for any non-fraudulent reason (so long as there is no statutory bar)
2. See VIP Resource Library for the entire opinion.

Informal Name Change	Legal Name Change
54 Pa.C.S.A. Names § 701(b) <u>Informal change of name</u> . Notwithstanding subsection (a), a person may at any time adopt and use <u>any name</u> if such name is used consistently, non-fraudulently and exclusively .	54 Pa.C.S.A. Names § 701(a1) <u>Procedure</u> . An individual must file a petition in the Court of Common Pleas of the county in which the individual resides.
You can legally use and go by any name that you choose, so long as you aren't trying to commit fraud.	You need to complete the legal name change process through the court to update your identification documents, in most circumstances.*

B. Felony Barriers

1. *In re A.S.D.*, 175 A.3d 339 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2017)
 - a. This case addresses the two-year felony bar issue
 - b. The trial court denied a name change to A.S.D. even though she had satisfied the requirements of 54 Pa.C.S. § 702(c)(1), and also imposed an additional twelve-month waiting period for her to re-file.

C. Changing Last Names – *In re Miller*, 824 A.2d 1207 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2003).

1. Confirms that court cannot deny unmarried same-gender couple's petition to change last names to match based on judge's beliefs.
2. Less relevant following *Whitewood v. Wolf* (Pa. 2014) and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (U.S. 2015), but remains relevant for some families

II. ADDITIONAL NOTES ON PRONOUNS AND GRAMMAR



Allyship Beyond the Basics: Personal Pronouns and Why They Matter

Why should you include your pronouns when you introduce yourself?

1. It's a quick and easy way to **vocalize inclusion** as well as to support, celebrate, and affirm our transgender and nonbinary colleagues.
2. It communicates **where our values lie** and that we envision a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
3. It can be **a conversation starter** that allows us to lead with our allyship and educate new and potential allies about gender identity, gender expression, and the gender spectrum.

Pronouns: The basics and beyond!



	Pronoun	Nominative	Oblique	Possessive	Possessive	Reflexive
Have questions about a pronoun that is not included here? Google the term "neopronoun"	He	He is laughing	I called him	His eyes gleam	That is his	He likes himself
	She	She is laughing	I called her	Her eyes gleam	That is hers	She likes herself
	They (most common)	They are laughing	I called them	Their eyes gleam	That is theirs	They like themselves
	Xe "zee"	Xe is laughing	I called xem	Xyr eyes gleam	That is xyrs	Xe likes xemself
	Ze "zee"	Ze is laughing	I called zir	Zir eyes gleam	That is zirs	Ze likes zirself



pflag.org

III. IMPACT OF ANTI-LGBTQ+ DISCRIMINATION

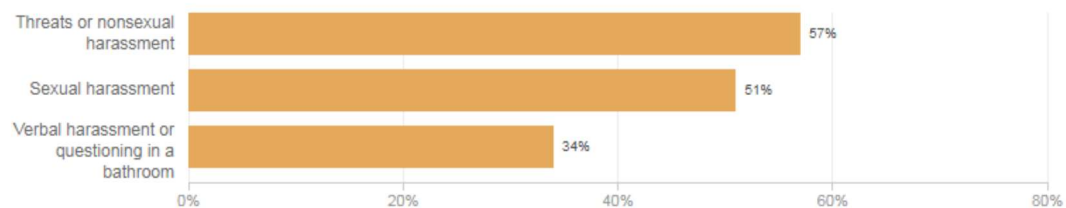
Percentage of LGBTQ Americans saying they or an LGBTQ friend or family member has experienced violence because they are LGBTQ



Source: NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health: "Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans." Survey of 489 U.S. adults conducted Jan. 26-April 9, 2017. The margin of error for the full LGBTQ sample is +/- 6.6 percentage points. Each question was asked of half of the sample.

Credit: Matthew Zhang/NPR

Percentage of LGBTQ Americans saying they or an LGBTQ friend or family member has experienced various forms of individual discrimination because they are LGBTQ

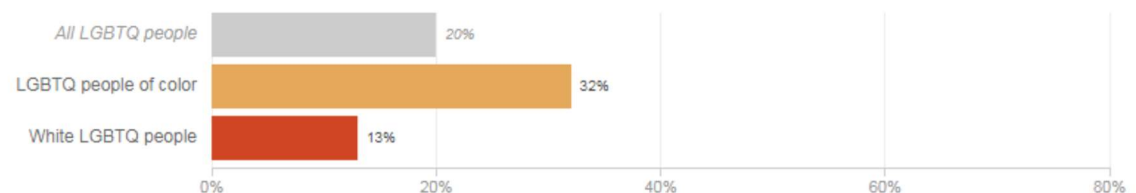


Source: NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health: "Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans." Survey of 489 U.S. adults conducted Jan. 26-April 9, 2017. The margin of error for the full LGBTQ sample is +/- 6.6 percentage points. Each question was asked of half of the sample.

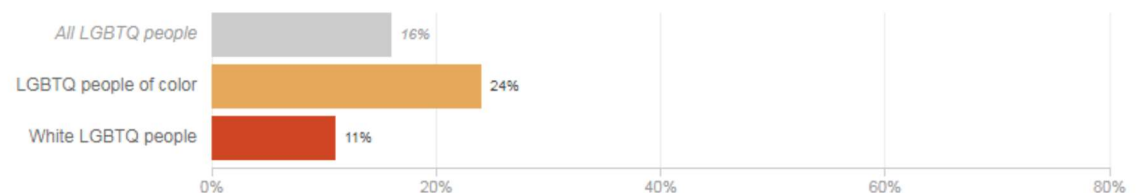
Credit: Matthew Zhang/NPR

Percentage of LGBTQ people, by race or ethnicity, saying they have ever been **personally discriminated against** in each situation because they are LGBTQ

APPLYING FOR JOBS



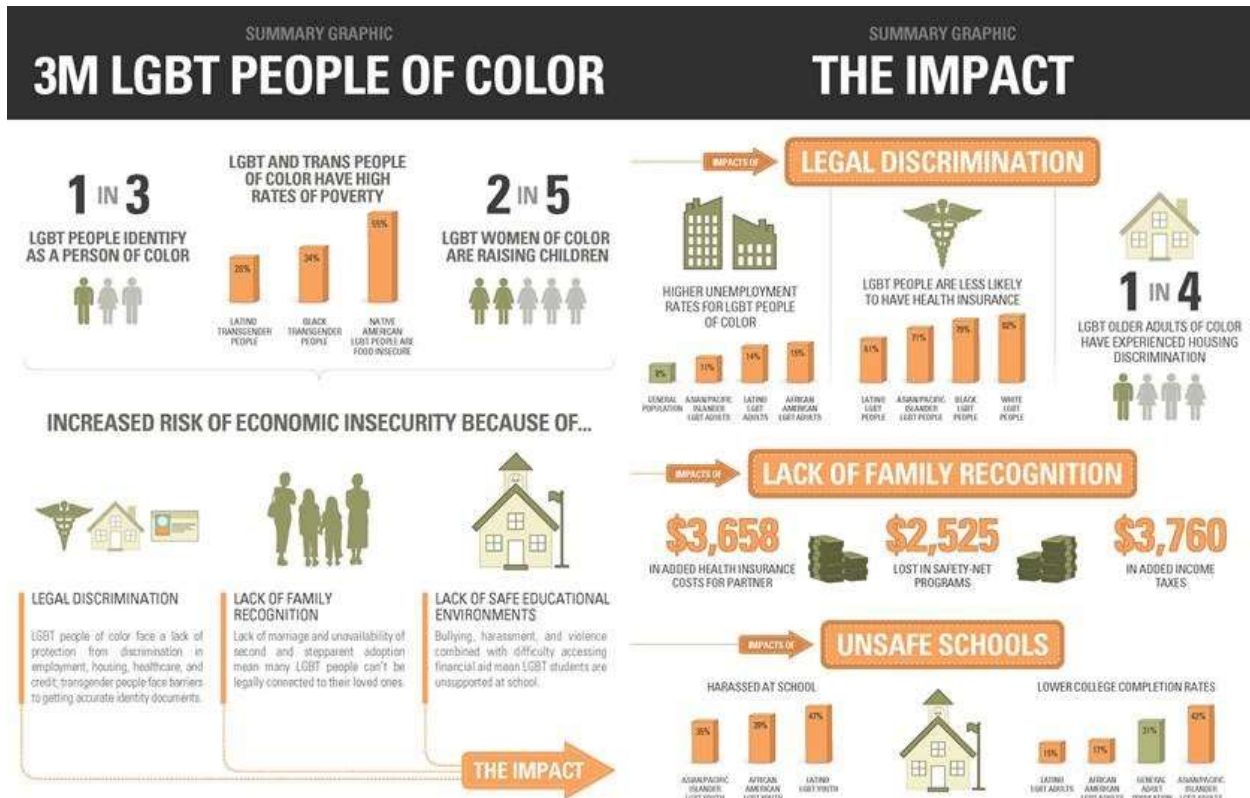
INTERACTING WITH POLICE



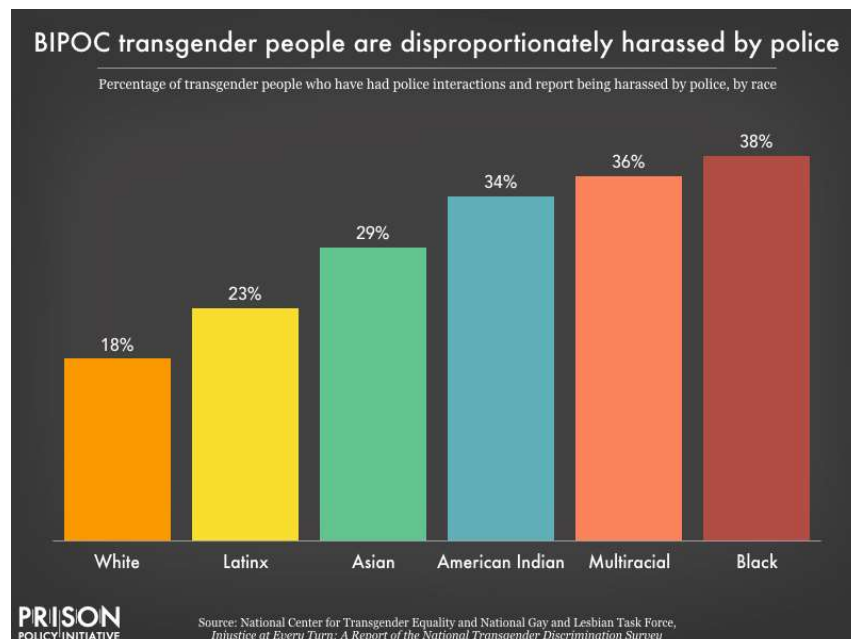
Source: NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health: "Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans." Survey of 489 U.S. adults conducted Jan. 26-April 9, 2017. The margin of error for the full LGBTQ sample is +/- 6.6 percentage points. Each question was asked of half of the sample.

Credit: Matthew Zhang/NPR

IV. IMPACT OF ANTI-LGBTQ+ DISCRIMINATION, SPECIFICALLY ON LGBTQ+ PEOPLE OF COLOR



1. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, nearly 50% of trans people reported that they do not feel comfortable seeking help from police.



V. GLOSSARY

Source: It Gets Better Project LGBTQ+ Glossary, <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/glossary>

1. Gender Expression: The external manifestations of gender, expressed through such things as names, pronouns, clothing, haircuts, behavior, voice, body characteristics, and more.
2. Gender Identity: One's internal, deeply held sense of gender. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.
3. Sex: A person's sex is a combination of bodily characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. This is commonly assigned at birth based on appearance of external genitalia.
4. Sexual Orientation: The desire one has for emotional, romantic, and/or sexual relationships with others based on their gender expression, gender identity, and/or sex. Many people choose to label their sexual orientation, while others do not.
5. Queer: Adjective. In a very basic sense, anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender.
6. Transgender: A person whose gender identity does not match the sex assigned to them at birth.
7. Cisgender: A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
8. Nonbinary describes a person whose gender identity does not conform to the gender binary. Not all non-binary people identify as trans.
9. Gender Expansive/Genderqueer/Gender Nonconforming describe individuals whose gender identity and/or gender expression expands beyond, actively resists, and/or does not conform to the current cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to male or female. Not all trans people are gender non-conforming, not all gender non-conforming people are trans.
10. Agender describes someone who does not align themselves with any particular gender.

VI. READINGS ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF TRANS PEOPLE

1. General
 - a. Report of the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey
<http://www.ustranssurvey.org/>
 - b. Understanding Issues Facing LGBT Americans
<http://www.lgbtmap.org/file/understanding-issues-facing-lgbt-americans.pdf>

2. Financial Challenges
 - a. “Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for Being Transgender in America” <https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/paying-an-unfair-price-transgender.pdf>
 - b. “The Staggering Costs of Being Transgender in the US” <https://www.businessinsider.com/transgender-medical-care-surgery-expensive-2019-6>
 - c. “How Much Does It Cost to Medically Transition?” <https://www.out.com/out-exclusives/2019/8/02/how-much-does-it-cost-medically-transition>

VII. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. GLSEN: <https://www.glsen.org/research-list?program=All&type=All&issue=All&topic=All&grade=All>
2. It Gets Better Project: <https://itgetsbetter.org/education/>
3. Trans Student Educational Resources: <https://transstudent.org/>
4. Advocates for Transgender Equality: www.transequality.org
5. The Transgender Law Center: www.transgenderlawcenter.org
6. Sylvia Rivera Law Project: www.srlp.org
7. TGI Justice Project: www.tgijp.org
8. InterAct Advocates for Intersex Youth: <https://interactadvocates.org>