

My name is Blair Watson and I would like to offer the following testimony in support of H.628 sponsored by Rep. Taylor Small, et al.

My name is a chosen name. I am a genderfluid human being. I spent months contemplating this name and trying a series of other names until I found the one that fit me. I spent several more months and hundreds of dollars following through on the legal name change process. Even though I've gone through the processes of obtaining law licenses in Vermont, Kentucky, and Ohio, I found the name change process daunting and confusing. I sought advice from friends who had already changed their name. I consulted a guide produced by the Pride Center. I asked several questions of the court clerks, the DMV website, and workers at the Social Security office. I invested hours upon hours into navigating the process of changing my name and obtaining state-issued identification that reflected my chosen name and "X" gender marker.

I cried when I received my new identification card. What that card says with all its official stamps and insignia, with "Vermont" emblazoned across it, with the power it holds to unlock doors to employment, air travel, mortgages, leases, banking, credit, adult purchases, and everywhere else that state-issued identification is required is that I am real. It says that I have as much right to be here as people who never need to change their name or gender markers to align with their authentic selves. It says I belong here too, just as I am. And it says that even in a world full of people who may disagree with me or who may even discriminate or assault me, at least I can hold on to this identification and know that the government of my state takes me serious and provides me with equal protection under the law.

There are many queer and transgender Vermonters who are not so fortunate as I am. They haven't been to law school and spent a decade plus of their lives getting comfortable with courtrooms and legal documents. I can't imagine how difficult these processes and court appearances are for them. Additionally, the costs could easily be prohibitive or impossible.

And yet there remains a gap in my legal protection: I won't be able to update my birth certificate in my home state of Kentucky because of their current law. My birth certificate classifies me as male though I do not dress or live my life in a way that most people associate with a man. I am genderfluid so I also do not refer to myself as a woman, but my daily attire, manner, and presentation to the world is definitely feminine, or aligned with what society describes as femininity anyway. So when I look and present the way I do and have to show my birth certificate, I am immediately placed at risk for discrimination. The outcome of the interaction can change drastically depending completely on the gatekeeper reading my document and their feelings about transgender people.

Not only does my birth certificate immediately out me as a transgender person; it is also a reminder that no matter what I do to build my authentic life, people I've never met have more power to define me than I do. The doctor who delivered me and determined my gender with a passing glance at the anatomy of my infant body. The gatekeepers overseeing the current birth certificate process. The medical providers I see and the medical records I have to present to validate what I claim about myself. The people handling documents for companies and governmental departments that require a birth certificate. All of which currently have more power to declare my gender identity than I do.

But Vermont has an opportunity to provide its citizens a better way. I support H.628 because it presents an opportunity for Vermont to continue leading the nation in support of its queer citizens. This change in the law won't fix my birth certificate and provide me with the complete safe haven of consistent and accurate records I desire, but it would do so for all of my transgender Vermont friends and all of the future transgender Vermonters yet to be born. This change in the law is necessary for transgender people all over the spectrum of gender and socio-economic status to obtain birth certificates that coherently and accurately reflect who they are. We should not have to prove ourselves to gatekeepers more than we already do and more than cisgendered people do. Nor should

transgender people need advanced knowledge in legal process and an abundance of time and money and appropriate healthcare in order to change a simple birth certificate to accurately describes themselves because when was the last time a registrar asked a cisgender person to prove they were man or woman enough to claim their gender identity? Not only do we deserve and demand equal protection under the law, but Vermont as a national leader in ensuring rights for all of its citizens should make the process as simple, cheap, and accessible as possible so that the life-changing affirmation and validation of an accurate birth certificate is available to everyone and not just those who are cisgender or those who are transgender and have privileged access to education, employment, and supportive health care.

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they/them

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