

Hello, I am Charlie McCaffrey, I am 16, use they/them pronouns and work with Outright Vermont as a youth organizer. I live in Berlin and attend Montpelier High School. My transition has been one that has gifted me many experiences, both good and bad, that have shaped me into the person I am today, and while it is far from over, this bill grants the ability for trans people to have a more seamless experience when trying to get their identity recognized legally in the state.

A person's journey into discovering themselves and their place in the world is an often long road that we never exactly see the end of. And for the trans community that is especially true. I realized I was trans when I was 12 years old, and it was a process that put my mind and body against one another. I knew something was wrong but I didn't have the words to begin explaining what I was feeling to the world around me. And when I found those words and came out, I then spent the next 2 years trying so hard to prove to the world, to my family, that this was real. That *I* was real.

Having to expose a part of yourself that is deeply personal to satisfy someone else's ideas of who you are is an exhausting process. One that nearly cost me my life, and I know I am not alone in this.

So why are we asking trans people to once again bare themselves to the state, and be judged on if their experiences and their person are worthy of being recognized and respected?

The difficulty of getting your information changed is putting countless trans people at the risk of being outed and exposed to violence. Which is why, for me and many of my trans peers, getting our information changed legally is such a big milestone. This bill will allow trans people to get their information changed sooner and without harm so that they can rest assured that they are being accurately represented to places like their school, work, and doctors. There is no doubt that this bill will save lives, and put not only the current generations of trans people at ease. But also hopefully improve the quality of life of the trans community of the future. As we can hope to not lose as many bright minds as we do today, because of the difficulties that they face.

Good Afternoon,

My name is Sawyer Totten, I am 18 years old and I identify as a transgender male. I have been through the process of legally changing my gender. I had to provide evidence of my transition by my doctors to prove that I fit the criteria to have my gender legally changed to get a new birth certificate. On top of that, I had to petition the Probate Court and have a court order signed by a judge approving my gender change. A person shouldn't have to get a court order to be able to legally change their gender. The original guidelines for changing one's gender says that the person who is petitioning to legally change their gender has to provide sufficient evidence of sexual reassignment. The evidence must be provided by a physician who has treated the individual and is signed. It shouldn't be up to anyone but the person petitioning for a legal gender change to make the choice that this is what is right for them.

I am in full support of this bill and we need to stop requiring that trans and non-binary people show proof of their transition to have access to things that cisgender people don't have to jump through hoops for. Trans people don't need to justify their reasoning for doing things that validate who they are.

Good afternoon, my name is Catherine Thomas. I am 18 years old, I use she/they pronouns, and I work as a Youth Organizer at Outright Vermont. I will be graduating from Twin Valley Middle High School this year. I am eager to speak to you all about the bill H.628. Passing this bill would change so many lives for the better. Transphobia is rampant globally, and Vermont is no exception. Every day, transgender people risk their lives to express themselves. In 2019, Vermont had the second highest rate of bias-motivated incidents against LGBTQIA+ people in the country. This is unacceptable. I hear slurs thrown at my trans peers every single day, whether in the classroom or on the street. If these children could change their birth certificate to help ease the obstacles that they face, they may have a better chance at a normal school career. According to the 2019 YRBS survey data, LGBT high school students were more than two times as likely to be threatened with a weapon on school property. These are young people. They deserve to be protected, and it is the responsibility of the legislature to protect them. If this bill is not passed, I have no doubt in my mind that my peers will continue to be singled out and discriminated against due to their sex assigned at birth.

<https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/tables/table-13-state-cuts/vermont.xls>

<https://www.security.org/resources/anti-lgbt-hate-crime-stats/>

https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/CHS_YRBS_statewide_report.pdf Page 27

Good Afternoon,

My name is Dana Kaplan, he/him pronouns, and I am the Executive Director of Outright Vermont.

Outright is Vermont's LGBTQ+ youth organization, helping what's estimated to be 14% of our states' youth¹ find hope in a world that hasn't yet caught up with their lived realities and basic needs.

As it's been stated, having a legal document that reflects your identity has far-reaching impacts on every aspect of a young persons' life. Proven social and medical benefits include, but are not limited to: Fewer suicide attempts, ideation, and depressive symptoms.

Make no mistake about it, having to navigate the incongruence of such basic and powerful documents can often be outright dangerous, adding fuel to already unconscionable levels of ignorance, bias, and discrimination that a person just trying to live their authentic life, and happens not to be cisgender, can face.

Yes this is true even here in Vermont, wherein a youth recently shared a story with me about how they were refused care at the ER when the doctor realized they were transgender.

The research is clear: the risk LGBTQ youth face is outsized¹, and the support needed to mitigate that risk must affirm and celebrate all of our beautiful and unique selves.

We cannot stand by when 50% of these young people purposefully hurt themselves in the last month, when in the past year 36% made a suicide plan, and 1 in 5 attempted suicide. And those are YRBS data points gathered **before** the devastating and compounding impacts that overworked systems and widespread disconnection has created from this global pandemic.

When we can look back at history to see the ways inclusive social policies - laws like marriage equality - have been directly linked to decreases in youth suicide, **passing this pivotal legislation is not just the right thing to do, it's basic survival. Identity validation saves lives.** Seeing ourselves accurately reflected on the very documents that prove our existence, and that we need to go about our daily lives, matters.

Birth certificates are so common that many of us overlook their significance until we need to use them. Where they are necessary to obtain a social security number, apply for a passport, enroll in schools, get a driver's license, gain employment, or apply for other benefits, Desmond Tutu said it best, describing the birth certificate as "a small paper that actually establishes who you are and gives access to the rights, privileges, and obligations of citizenship."

The minority stress model helps us frame the disparities among marginalized communities, noting that poor health outcomes are caused not by being who you are, but as a result of the relentless struggle that comes from having to navigate the prejudice and harm imbedded in the very systems and structures we depend on.

It's hard being a young person in the best of circumstances. And these days, well, we are a far cry from anything resembling ideal.

I implore you to take every opportunity you have as changemakers with this bill - and any others for that matter - that could in some way, large or small, rectify the very real, lived impact of ignorance, hate, and harassment on a policy level.

This is about giving some of our most targeted, vulnerable Vermonters the chance to live full lives, lives that start and depend on the most basic of legal documents to affirm our identities.

The stakes are too high not to get this one right. The time is now.

In a recent study of MA and RI residents who happened to be trans, those who had access to legal gender marker and name change had lower negative emotional responses to gender-based mistreatment, and improved mental health outcomes.

For many transgender and gender diverse (trans) folks, an important process of social gender affirmation is pursuing *legal* gender affirmation by updating one's legal name and gender marker on identification documents.

Possessing an accurate government ID is often necessary to access healthcare, housing, education and employment, the very resources from which trans people continue to be excluded and marginalized.

Let's use the opportunity before us to create ease and access where we can - in a world where so much is beyond our control, it's incumbent on us all to take action where we can.

We must acknowledge that the current process for changing gender markers is confusing and somewhat convoluted, which is not what youth need.

We appreciate that the Department of Health has indicated support for this change. And, we do request that you include specificity regarding the protection of privacy in amending these documents. Happy to see that new language included. We must make the legislative intent clear: privacy protections are critical and non-negotiable.

And wherein we have recognized a need for a third option on drivers license, we must follow suit with birth certificates. Let's make the language clear and explicit, ensuring the Department of health **shall** (not 'may') adopt rules to add more options to gender markers.

Many states have not yet modernized their policy or process, making it significantly challenging for. But it's 2022 - and we are Vermont. Let's get out in front like the leaders we are.

Rules that meet a minimum standard for the well-being of our most marginalized community members are the rules we need. Increasing structural support for trans individuals, including enactment of state policies ease legal gender affirmation is a move we can make, today.

Bottom line is that we all want to live a life congruent with who we know ourselves to be. When you see windows and mirrors that both reflect possibilities for your future self, and current versions of who you are in the people around you, it's life changing.

Thank you for your clear, bold action to support policies and provisions that give the people most affected by systemic failures a chance to live.