



TO: Senate Judiciary Committee
FROM: Oblio Stroyman, Executive Director, Trans*Ponder
DATE: May 3, 2017
RE: Vote YES on HB 2673A

Chair Senator Prozanski and Members of Committee:

My name is Oblio Stroyman, Executive Director of Trans*Ponder, a transgender founded and led non-profit created to empower and support trans/gender diverse people and our allies. We are based in Eugene and provide support to hundreds of transgender Oregonians and their families in Central and Southern Oregon.

I am here on behalf of Trans*Ponder and to share my story in support of HB 2673A, a bill to help transgender Oregonians.

Trans*Ponder was started by necessity by a couple of us who were navigating systems that do not easily affirm us, and at times are downright frightening. One of the major obstacles we each have faced personally, and is of major community concern, is the name and gender change process. The obstacles we face are monetary, bureaucratic and psychological.

As a professional in the mental health field with an alter-abled son, the cost of updating my identity documents was a monetary barrier for years. Even if I made my own documentation changes a monetary priority, I didn't know where to go or who to talk to for support in updating my identity documents. This process is confusing, cumbersome and requires medical visits and a public personal and private information. These are psychological and emotional barriers, and poses a very real threat to my safety.

Currently, only some of my identification documents has my correct gender, which causes confusion when I am asked what my legal gender is. This outs me in ways that feel unsafe. This past year, I finally took steps to make all my documents congruent, and I am anxiously awaiting completion of this process. My name and address are currently posted at a courthouse in a public gender change posting, available to any past or current client of mine, or any member of the public. As a mental health professional, privacy and confidentiality are paramount. I have already had an experience in which a former client sent me threatening messages via social media after I had made a mandated child abuse report. I am terrified about what would happen if he sees my posting.

By the time we step into a courtroom, transgender Oregonians have already had psychological and medical professionals affirm, under perjury of law, that we are fit to move forward in our gender and name change processes. This should be enough. Our court hearing should be a day of celebration, marking all the obstacles we have overcome; a time when we will be seen as who we are, rather than a day of full of fear, red tape and potential violence.

At Trans*Ponder, we work hard to find ways to streamline the process for trans/gender diverse people, yet every week we hear stories from community members who've had difficult experiences, including from Trans*Ponder's administrative staff, who are college educated and employed. How can we expect our members, many who are underemployed and emotionally vulnerable to be able to do this alone and complete it emotionally unscathed? We serve rural Oregonians who travel miles to attend our meetings or use the internet to reach us for support because they do not feel safe to seek support in their communities. They share with us that it is downright dangerous to have incongruent identification, and that it is a barrier for them to obtain the services and employment that they need to live.

We know that when we do not have proper documentation we are more likely to avoid medical care; more likely to get questioned by law enforcement; and more likely to be outed in unsafe situations. We have higher instances of depression, anxiety and self-esteem directly related to gender affirming obstacles, and this contributes to challenges in seeking and maintaining gainful employment. I have experienced these things personally and professionally, and these realities are well documented in the 2015 United States Transgender Survey. In this political climate, where states like North Carolina have implemented discriminatory bathroom rules and the Federal government has reversed protections for transgender youth, I urge you to demonstrate Oregon's leadership for transgender equality and human rights.

Today the name change process is inaccessible for people monetarily and psychologically, and it is potentially unsafe for people like me. HB 2673 is an opportunity to put this process in reach of transgender Oregonians and help us thrive. You have the power to improve these circumstances and improve the lives of transgender people like me.

Thank you, members of the committee for the opportunity to speak, I urge you to support HB 2673A.