



SB0581 – Action for Change of Name – Waiver of Publication Requirement
Presented to the Hon. Will Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 18, 2021 11:00 a.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0581 – Action for Change of Name – Waiver of Publication Requirement**, sponsored by Senator Shelly Hettleman.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. It is essential to our goal of promoting and defending the reproductive rights of all Maryland residents, that we also prioritize patients' mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. The waiving of a newspaper publication requirement when filing for a change of name is a considerable advancement in the rights of transgender and survivors of interpersonal violence.

The act of changing one's name can hold great significance for transgender individuals in expressing their chosen identities, and to prevent discrimination or violence against that person for being transgender. For survivors of domestic violence and the children of convicted sex offenders, the name change may serve as an essential strategy in seeking long-term safety and the ability to rebuild their lives while recovering from the harm of those crimes. We believe that the publication of name changes in local newspapers is an antiquated requirement that intrudes on an individual's right to privacy. Petitioners with such safety concerns should have the right to waive the publication requirement. The safety and welfare of these individuals far outvalues the mandate.

We must also consider the costs associated with such a requirement. The charge for filing a name-change petition is \$165 in Maryland, and the cost of newspaper publication varies from \$50 - \$100¹. For low-income individuals, the unemployed/underemployed, and those financially dependent on their guardians, spending over \$200 on the change of name process is an extremely difficult, and sometimes even impossible, commitment. This financial burden often prevents people from legalizing their new name and identity and should not be hindered by socioeconomic status.

SB0581 waives the publication requirement for individuals who have filed for a change of name with the Maryland courts. The ability to obtain legal identification documents that match one's chosen name promotes the likelihood of them seeking and accessing health care services, employment options, and other public health and social benefits². This bill is a significant step in ensuring the rights of Marylanders in need of this form of legal relief and reducing socioeconomic discrimination in such legal processes. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0581**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Baran, Kira, and Kira Baran. "Navigating Maryland's Name-Change Publication Requirement." Legal Data Design Clinic, April 9, 2020. <https://blogs.ubalt.edu/legaldatadesign/2020/04/09/navigating-marylands-name-change-publication-requirement/>

² "Name and Gender Change for Transgender and Non-Binary Individuals." FreeState Justice. Accessed February 14, 2021. <https://freestate-justice.org/our-issues/identity-documents/>