

**Testimony in SUPPORT for H8155**  
**Vimala Phongsavanh, Senior Director, External Affairs**  
**Planned Parenthood of Southern New England**  
**Rhode Island House Judiciary Committee**  
**Tuesday, May 7, 2024**

Chair Craven and honorable members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England with **strong support for House Bill 8155 (Rep. Craven) to outline the process for a person petitioning to change their name in probate court in the town or city where they reside**. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE), provided sexual and reproductive health care to over 7,000 patients last year at our Providence health center. We believe all people should have access to quality, affordable, and compassionate health care as a basic human right — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or your immigration status.

Since the name change process currently varies based on the city/town of the probate court, H8155 aims to bring greater consistency, fairness and safety to the process for adults by:

- Making Rhode Island’s statute on name change during divorce gender inclusive
- Allowing court costs for name change to be waived for those who cannot afford them
- Removing the requirement for public notice or publication of a name change
- Allowing the court to seal name change records if doing so is warranted by the person’s safety needs, based on their circumstances, which can include a person’s status as transgender or a survivor of domestic violence

These changes will:

- Allow more people safe and affordable access to the name change process.
- Ensure transgender people’s legal identity can reflect their lived reality, without undue burdens and without having to out themselves to their local community, which could invite harassment or discrimination.
- Enable survivors of domestic violence to have their name change records sealed, without needing to relive their trauma to get a special exception.
- Ensure everyone is included in Rhode Island’s statutory scheme on post-divorce name changes.

Transgender rights and reproductive rights are inextricably linked, and there is so much work to be done to strengthen our state laws to increase the safety and security of rights for transgender people in Rhode Island. This year alone, 586 anti-trans bills were brought forward in legislatures across the nation, 85 of which passed. Many of these bills deny gender-affirming care to people who can consent and want access to this care. This is a clear example of how these types of laws, like abortion bans, are intended to take away someone’s bodily autonomy and place control over what someone can and cannot do with their own body.

Although Rhode Island has some protections in place to protect transgender people, we have more work to do to protect and expand their rights. H8155 is important because getting a name change is a step toward bodily autonomy and living fully as oneself. Planned Parenthood will



continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure our patients and communities have what they need to live healthy and self-determined lives and **we urge the committee to vote in support of H8155.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vimala Phongsavanh', written in a cursive style.

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